“MY CONFIDENCE GREW”: A MIXED METHODS INVESTIGATION OF TEACHING IN THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

By examining the responses and first-hand experiences of general education teachers, this study attempted to ascertain factors that impact the confidence levels of general education teachers, which can subsequently impact their ability to meet the needs of their special education students. Participants completed rating and open-ended question reflections, participated in an interview, and were later observed in the inclusion classrooms. These data sources were coded to pull meaning and identify influences. By examining general education teacher responses and interviews, this study determined that lack of preparation, establishing a support team of stakeholders, gaining knowledge while instructing special education students, and changing perspectives/expectations of student ability influenced the confidence of general education teachers who participated in this study. An empirically derived progression was presented in this study for improving general education teacher confidence, related to developing their special education knowledge, and establishing a support system of colleagues. Additionally, the knowledge/skill and support needs, once met, appeared to lead to a transformation of beliefs in the general education teachers’ regarding their special education students; leading participants to become advocates for their students. Thus, for general education teachers to effectively meet the needs of their special education students, they must first have various needs met. I recommend that school districts/administration communicate with general education teachers about specific needs to focus professional development around; and establish Professional Learning Communities (PLC) devoted to promoting collaboration and communication between general education teachers and special education teachers to develop and fulfill the needs of the general education teachers.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION/CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

When the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975, Public Law 94-142) was passed, it called for a free and appropriate education for children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This law created a movement that allowed states and schools the resources to meet the individual instructional needs of children with disabilities. Prior to its passage, schools were not required to educate children with disabilities; indeed, many states had laws that excluded these children from being able to attend schools (Sprayberry, 2014). In 1990, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was reauthorized by Congress as the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and guaranteed equal education rights and protection under the law from discrimination. Additionally, any school that receives federal funding is required to provide free and equal education in the least restrictive environment. Soon after IDEA was implemented, over 90% of students with disabilities were receiving education services in public schools (Torreno & Grove, 2012). During the 1999-2000 school year, about half of the students with disabilities were being included in the general classrooms for about 80% of the day. IDEA has resulted in many special education students with varying disabilities (learning, behavioral, etc.) being included in the general classroom under the inclusion model; however, general education teachers are primarily teaching in these inclusive classrooms, and many general education teachers believe they do not have the skills or training to best serve these students (Barrett, 2013). Barrett’s article provides information on what a general educator should know regarding special education students (legality, key terms, etc.). However the article also notes that teachers can find the special education paperwork difficult to understand and
implement; and a teacher who attempts to teach special education students the same as a non-disabled students lacks understanding and is unable to meet students’ needs.

Statement of the Problem

According to a 1996 study on teachers’ perceptions of inclusive education, while an overwhelming majority of general education teachers were in favor of including children with disabilities in the general classrooms, only about one-third of these teachers believed they had the skills, knowledge, and ability to instruct these students (Rieser, 2013). Cassady (2011) reported that general teachers indicated different factors that affected their attitudes toward students with disabilities; including their confidence level, the perceived amount of support the teachers receive, and the opportunities to collaborate with others. These factors, impacting the teacher’s attitude, may affect the teacher’s level of instruction toward special education students. Some teachers indicated that their lack of confidence in their instructional skills was due to an absence of experience in teaching special education students, as well as the lack of quality support. This lack of confidence, in turn, affected their attitude toward inclusion students. Subsequently, this impacted their ability to successfully interact with and meet the unique instructional needs of their special education students (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006). This study examines the general education teacher’s confidence in instructing special education students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to scrutinize methods of building the confidence of general education teachers in order to help these teachers attain a level of self-efficacy that would improve their ability to teach special education students. This study attempted to determine the relationship between the confidence of general education teachers and factors that impact their ability to address the needs of their special education students. General education teachers have
previously expressed a lack of confidence, knowledge, and ability to instruct and manage special education students (Mader, 2017). Thus, this study attempted to note factors that impact the confidence of general education teachers when providing instruction to special education students.

**Significance of the Study**

Many teachers often feel underprepared or do not have confidence in their ability to instruct certain students, and this study offers qualitative data from the perspective of the general education teachers through teacher reflections and interviews. This study is significant because it may help foster increased confidence in general education teachers who also work with special education students. This phenomenology study will allow for general education teachers to provide a voice to their experiences working with special education students. These teachers will be able to communicate the positive and negative aspects of working with special education students and provide insight into the world of instructing special education students from the teachers’ perspectives. The teachers will be able to communicate various emotions, such as the joy of watching students succeed and struggles they have faced. Data from this study may help general education teachers enhance confidence in their teaching abilities, and may also help these teachers implement significant change in schools by working with administrators on programs that can better address the needs of general education teachers. Subsequently, this may positively impact special education students by allowing teachers to address the unique needs of these students. This study may also help refine and address certain mindsets about instructing special education students by raising awareness in general education teachers (and others) regarding meaningful instruction of special education students. Ideally, this will foster a culture in which educators are focused on developing accommodations and identifying learning styles of special
education students while assisting teachers and administrators in developing short-terms goals to meet both teacher needs and the needs of special education students.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed for this study:

- What is the experience of general education teachers teaching students that have IEPs?
- In what ways do teachers’ self-efficacy levels in instruction, assessment, curriculum, and behavioral management relate to their descriptions of their experiences teaching students with IEPs?

To answer these questions, experience refers to what an individual gains from interacting with and operating in the real world, which includes their environment and their inner reality regarding their environment (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2009). Experience is a critical component for meaningful interaction between general education teachers and special education students. From a phenomenology perspective, which is essential to this study, teacher experience includes teachers’ memories and stories about working with special education students. Experience is comprised of teachers’ emotion when they worked to include special education students in their classrooms and the trials they faced to improve the learning of their students. The research presented in this study is essential to understanding these interactions and the confidence of general education teachers, which subsequently impacts how these teachers meet the instructional and behavioral needs of their special education students.

Data and information that emerged in this study includes teachers’ thoughts and perspectives regarding their confidence in their abilities to instruct special education students. The general education teachers will be able to describe previous experiences working with
special education students, as well as other factors that contribute to their feelings about these students.

**Researcher Relation**

As a special education teacher, the researcher frequently engages in conversations with general education teachers about special education students, and their needs. Additionally, discussions with other teachers often occur regarding ways to help these students succeed academically. These conversations allowed the researcher to note that general education teachers are sometimes unaware of best practices for instruction and behavior modification for special education students. The researcher also noted that special education students might not always be in classrooms where special education teachers are present. Depending on their academic services, a special education student may not have a special education teacher for certain academic subjects. Conversely, there may be a special education teacher in the classroom, but he/she is busy working with another student. This prompted the researcher’s desire to conduct this study. To focus on finding ways to improve general education teachers’ confidence in working with special education students and helping those teachers meet the students’ unique instructional and behavioral needs.

**Definition of Terms**

- **Experience** – Experience is defined as what one gains from operating in the real world, in practice, and encompasses both the environment and one’s own inner reality relating to this environment (Lunenber...
• **General Education** – The education program that typically developing children receive, developed from state standards and evaluated using annual state educational standardized tests; also known as regular education (Webster, 2015).

• **Inclusion** – Opportunities for students with disabilities to learn and participate in the general education academic classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers (Special Education Guide, 2017).

• **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** – A federal law passed in 1975 that requires schools to serve the educational needs of students determined to be eligible as having a disability (Lee, 2017).

• **Self-Efficacy** – is defined as an individual’s belief in his/her capabilities to produce predetermined levels of performance that influence events in an individual’s life; as well as determines how an individual feels, thinks, behaves, and how self-motivation occurs. (Bandura, 1994; Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013).

• **Special Education** – specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (Center for Parent Information & Resources, 2017).

• **Students with Disabilities/Special Education Students** – students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) who receive special education services due to a variety of impairments: such as autism and/or communication disorders, visual and/or auditory impairments, and emotional disorders. Additional impairments may include intellectual disabilities, specific learning disabilities, orthopedic and other health impairments, which includes traumatic brain injuries (Oregon Department of Education, 2017)
Summary

Since the implementation of IDEA, special education students are being served primarily in the general classroom with general education teachers and non-disabled peers (Torreno & Grove, 2012). General education teachers have indicated that they lack the necessary preparation to instruct students with disabilities, even though these teachers agree with special education students’ placement and inclusion in the general education class (Rieser, 2013). Through the first-person accounts of the participants, this study examined the confidence levels of general education teachers in their ability to instruct special education students and the reasons for reported varying levels of confidence. Acquired data from this study could be used to better assist general education teachers in becoming more confident in their teaching abilities. Careful analysis of teacher perceptions may foster positive change in teacher preparation programs or help improve in-school professional development activities to better meet teachers’ needs. Additionally, teachers may enhance self-awareness about their own practices during the interviews conducted during the course of the study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

General education teachers have indicated that they lack confidence and when working with special education students, and this study sought to determine why these teachers did not have the necessary confidence to work with these students. This was a phenomenological study designed to gather information via the first-hand experience of general education teachers. This chapter examines how special education students came to be included in the general education classrooms by scrutinizing the judicial history of inclusion, the theoretical framework that underscores the study being conducted, how a teacher’s self-efficacy is developed, and how a teacher’s self-efficacy and confidence can impact his/her instruction of special education students. In order to gather the information for this chapter, I utilized the online library databases of Carson-Newman University and the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga. Through these online libraries, I searched for journal articles and studies using search terms such as: general education teachers and confidence/self-confidence, general education teachers and motivation, inclusion teaching models, general teachers and self-efficacy, general education teachers and efficacy, history of inclusion, and inclusion court cases. Additionally, I utilized sources found within articles and studies to locate additional articles and studies to further provide information for the various areas in the chapter. Additional online searches yielded articles that provided valuable information, and studies found through online journals were either purchased for the use of this dissertation or accessed through the online libraries of Carson-Newman or UT-Chattanooga.
History of Students with Disabilities

Before the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975, even as early as 100 years ago, *students with disabilities* were segregated into special schools, away from the traditional schools (Torreno & Grove, 2012). Between 1850 and 1950, individuals trained to care for students with disabilities began to develop special classes because differences in student learning were noted. Subsequently, parents and other stakeholders began promoting positive changes in instruction for students with special needs. In the mid-1920s teachers began to ascertain the value of instructing students with disabilities, though these students were still placed in specialized institutions.

The Beginnings of Special Education. Since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was enacted in 1975, students with disabilities have been attending regular schools more than ever (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). EAHCA provided students with disabilities with a right to a public education, which many non-disabled students took for granted (Esteves and Rao, 2008). EAHCA presented students with disabilities the legal right to attend public schools and be provided a free and appropriate education. EAHCA has since been reauthorized and amended two times to provide more support for students with disabilities. The first reauthorization reformulated the EAHCA into the *Individuals With Disabilities Education Act*, also known as IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). IDEA impacted how schools served special education students and initiated the shift from the pullout/resources model to the more familiar inclusion model of *special education* services (Dray, 2008). Since the inception of IDEA, additional advances have been made in expanding the educational opportunities for students with disabilities under legislative acts and major court cases (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These improvements were instituted to address the
needs of students with disabilities to provide these students with access to the public school education curriculum.

**Development of the Inclusion Classroom.** The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) mandated that all students with disabilities had the legal right for a public education, and public schools were required to provide a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (Esteves and Rao, 2008). Roncker v. Walter (1983) established that the least restrictive environment allows students to receive all necessary services while participating in public school activities; thus least restrictive environment is not a specific place or location, but a principle to be followed. This environment varies for each student, and could range from the typical inclusion classroom to pullout classes depending on student academic needs and necessary services. The intent of the phrase itself may have been to raise awareness that being segregated into a separate school was, in fact, a very restrictive environment and not ideal for learning. While this allowed students with disabilities access to public schools, the EAHCA limited educational opportunities offered to students with disabilities. Few research-based interventions were implemented, and student accountability was lacking because special education students were not required to take statewide standard assessments. When IDEA was reauthorized in 1997, a more meaningful and effective program for special education students was established.

According to Dray (2008), when IDEA was reauthorized in 1997, special education students began receiving inclusion services. Prior to this reauthorization, special education students were still being serviced primarily via pullout or resource classrooms, which called for students to be separated from their non-disabled peers and taught in separate classrooms with different curriculum standards and lower expectations. This reauthorization, however, mandated
that students were to be placed in the least restrictive classroom and were to be provided the necessary services to access curriculum in general education classrooms. Thus, special education students not only had access to the same curriculum as regular education students, but they also began to receive specific services to enhance their education. Schools were now required to provide information on why decisions were being made for the student, measurable goals for student learning, mandatory assessment and measurement of student learning growth, and progress monitoring of student goals (Esteves and Rao, 2008). Part of the original Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1973) had called for schools to assess and measure the effectiveness of their efforts to educate special education students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

As stipulated in IDEA, the justification for requiring the measurable goals and measurement of student growth was to ensure that each student’s academic needs were being met on his/her level so that effective practices and academic instruction were being provided to the student. If the students were not making progress, then teachers were required to examine the data, determine where the student was still struggling, and revise instruction. Additionally, special education teachers began entering the general education classrooms and becoming part of the instruction in those classrooms with the special education students (Dray, 2008). These special education teachers began to consult with, collaborate with, and co-teach with the general education teachers. The special education teachers worked with the general education teachers in developing accommodations and modifications to the content curriculum so that special education students could fully access and participate in the general classroom learning.

General education teachers and special education teachers began to examine how students responded to instruction in the classroom to determine appropriate interventions for the
students. This was the beginning of investigating alternate models of working with struggling students, who might have otherwise been labeled as special education students (Esteves and Rao, 2008). The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 further highlighted and developed the inclusion classrooms by implementing standards-based curriculum and research-based instruction (Dray, 2008). The goal of this type of intervention model was to address struggling students’ needs and provide interventions before referring these students to special education. General education teachers and special education teachers were now required to examine how the current instruction methods impacted student learning, examine student progress, use the collected data to adapt and implement new instructional strategies to better facilitate student access to the general education curriculum, and make changes to better promote student progress (Dray, 2008; Esteves and Rao, 2008).

**Major Court Cases (Impact/Influences on Schools and Students with Disabilities)**

Considering the increasing inclusion of special education students in the general education classrooms, as well as the time and effort that general education teachers must spend to adapt the classroom and materials for special education students, inclusion classrooms are an important focus. Following the history of how school systems have changed over the years, in addition to the decisions and mandates that have placed special education students in the general education classrooms, are important components of this study because they show how general education teachers have had to quickly modify their classrooms over the years to account for their new students. Numerous legal precedents, detailed in this chapter, have impacted American schools because they mandate that all students should be treated the same.

According to Kirby (2017), Beattie v. Board Education (1919) was one of the first major cases in American histories that addressed students with disabilities in public schools. In this
case, the Board of Education petitioned for a student with a disability to be removed from the public school setting based on the premise that this student was a distraction to the student’s peers and teacher. In this case, the courts agreed and justified the decision by stipulating that the student would be impeding the education of his/her peers. Advocates of students with disabilities did not gain a foothold until the 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) abolished the “Separate but Equal” clause that essentially prohibited African-American students from attending white schools. When courts ruled that any form of discrimination against students was illegal and that students could not be prohibited from attending certain schools, this provided the support for activists of students with disabilities to successfully influence the passing of laws that benefitted students with disabilities, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The passage of the EAHCA gave students with disabilities the right to attend public schools and take part in the same curriculum as their non-disabled peers. In 2004, EAHCA was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), which asserted that least restrictive environment and free and appropriate public education were necessary to ensure that students with disabilities had access to the same education as their non-disabled peers. Least restrictive environment ensures that students are to be served within the general classrooms unless deemed unable to succeed in the general classroom. The language of this latest reauthorization promoted inclusion for students with disabilities and a commitment to overcome the barriers that impede their inclusion in the general classroom.

The process to include students with disabilities in the inclusion and general classrooms has been litigated often to frame current opportunities available to students. The least restrictive environment, which ensures these students are placed in general classrooms, has been developed
in the courts over a period of years (Alquraini, 2013; Kluth, Villa, & Thousand, 2001). Roncker v. Walter (1983) challenged the placements of students with disabilities into programs that were specific to a particular disability and initiated the concept of least restrictive environment. According to Alquraini (2013), a student, Roncker, was placed in a segregated school for students with disabilities, and Roncker’s parents were disappointed with a previous ruling that dictated that Roncker must remain in the segregated school. Subsequently, the U.S. Sixth Court of Appeals declared that if the services being provided to Roncker could be transferred to the general public-school setting, then the ruling that mandated attendance to a segregated school should be rescinded. This ruling began the implementation of special education services that are currently provided in general education classrooms, which serve as present-day inclusion models.

In Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education (1989) an IEP team decided that Daniel was not making enough progress in the regular kindergarten classes, even with modifications, and should be placed in a special education class and only interact with his non-disabled peers at lunch time. The parents carried the case to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Two tests were established to determine if placement was in the least restrictive environment; 1) whether supplemental aids and services could be provided in the regular classrooms, and 2) if the student continues to receive the same quality of education if placed in a separate special education class (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Thus, guidelines were established for the determination of least restrictive environment, and a precedent was established that supplementary aids and services had to be considered and reviewed for regular education classrooms.
Sacramento City Unified School District, Board of Education v. Rachel H (1994) further established ways to determine least restrictive environment. Four tests were developed to determine least restrictive environment.

(1) A comparison of the educational benefits of students with disabilities in regular classrooms with services that he or she needs versus his or her educational benefits in separate classrooms, (2) the non-academic benefit in terms of social or communication skills through interaction between students with and without disabilities, (3) the cost of the inclusion and (4) the effect of the student with disabilities upon learning processes in the regular education classroom. (Alquraini, pp. 155, 2013)


Additionally, there were a number of smaller court decisions that also advanced and promoted increased educational opportunities for students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizen v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972) and Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1972) established that states and local school districts had the responsibility to educate students with disabilities.

In all of these cases, the factors that the courts used provided schools with guidelines and tests that now had to be considered when determining the least restrictive environment of a special education student. Present-day schools are more likely to review these guidelines and
factors in the initial or annual IEP meetings of the special education students, which allows all those involved in the student’s education to be present and provide adequate input to assist with decision-making. These decisions, guided by factors established in previous court cases, serve as the basis of the decision to include students with disabilities in the general education inclusion classrooms, as well as deciding the services and assistance these students need to fully access and take part in the general curriculum.

The history of these laws created the framework that has developed over time into modern-day inclusion models. It became apparent that students with disabilities needed assistance from the courts to have the same rights to an education as their non-disabled peers. For the purposes of this study, I suggest that the theoretical framework of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs be used to provide a model for this research. Additionally, Maslow’s theory can be used explore the concept that in order for special education students to be effectively taught in the general education classrooms, general education teachers must have their needs met to better instruction special education students and be able to meet the needs of these students.

The history of the development of inclusion classrooms is extensive, and numerous changes have been enacted to ensure that special education students can participate in general education classrooms. The necessity of general education teachers adapting their curriculum, materials, and classroom instruction to meet the needs of special education students is subsequently detailed. The importance of these adaptations cannot be understated because these modifications and accommodations are essential for special education students to better access curriculum and help them improve academically.

**Teacher Adaptations for Special Education Students**
Classrooms Adaptations. Stevens, Everington, and Kozar-Kocsis (2002) determined that general education teachers are adapting their classrooms in numerous ways to accommodate special education students. These accommodations include re-designing room arrangements, offering individual instruction, teaching to different learning styles, altering assignments, and providing prompts for students with special needs. These adaptations occur on a daily or weekly basis. Teachers adapted their instructional styles by using different instructional strategies to support special education students, including peer tutoring, teaching specific skills, providing social opportunities, and using cooperative learning skills. As shown in Figure 2.1, approximately 79% of teachers indicated they had training through in-service programs to assist in working with special education students. Additionally, 66% of teachers reported that some college coursework assisted in working with special education students, and 48% noted that training through other workshops occurred.

![Figure 2.1. Adaptation Training](image)

Figure 2.1 illustrates the percentage of general education teachers who receive adaptation training through various sources.
Accommodations and Modifications. When special education students are instructed in the general inclusion classrooms, those classrooms and instructional materials must be adapted and designed to meet the unique needs of the students and focus on addressing the student’s weak areas (King-Sears & Bowman-Kruhm, 2011). Classroom instruction must ensure student understanding and allow the student to acquire content knowledge. For example, if a 5th grade student is reading well below grade level, then it is reasonable to assume that student cannot follow instruction designed for 5th grade students. However, preparing students with disabilities to learn in the general education classroom with the heavy demands is an ongoing struggle for educators (Deshler, Schumaker, Lenz, Bulgren, Hock, Knight, & Ehren, 2001). In order for students to access the curriculum and understand the content, a variety of instructional methods are required. Numerous services enhance instruction, such as consultation with special education teachers to identify methods of adapting instructional material, co-teaching, and utilizing various accommodations and modifications to adapt the curriculum materials (King-Sears & Bowman-Kruhm, 2011). Students who do not read well may receive additional instructional materials or have content read aloud to enhance understanding of the material. Assessments may also be modified by increasing testing times, minimizing the assessment, and reading questions aloud to students (Stevens, Everington, & Kozar-Kocsis, 2002). In this manner, teachers adapt instructional materials in order to enhance student learning.

Students with disabilities may also need to learn the curriculum through different protocols than the traditional textbook manner (Brigham, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2011). One different method of instruction is the activities-based approach, which asks students to utilize what they are learning through a hands-on activity that supports and reinforces their learning. Where the traditional textbook method may result in student being off-task due to his/her lack of
understanding of the content or ability to follow along in the reading material, activity-based approaches can help students remain on task and demonstrate appropriate behaviors. According to King-Sears and Bowman-Kruhm (2011), accommodations and modifications should not be used to replace individualized instruction for students in order to address areas of need for these students. Deshler, Schumaker, Lenz, Bulgren, Hock, Knight, & Ehren, (2001) advocated that accommodations help students access the curriculum, learn the content, and earn credits. Stevens, Everington, & Kozar-Kocsis (2002) stated that general education teachers utilize methods that support the learning of both special education students and general education students, which is a positive outcome of inclusion. These methods include cooperative learning groups, peer tutoring, incidences of special interactions, and study guides.

Being able to make the accommodations and modifications to the classroom instruction and materials is a necessary skill that general teachers require to successfully meet the needs of their students. Teachers who can make the necessary adaptions to the instructional material to account for their student needs provide the students the opportunity to learn the content curriculum at a level where students can excel, which is one of the most important aspects of the inclusion classrooms. Inclusion classrooms provide a number of benefits other than helping the students to learn the curriculum.

Benefits of Inclusion

Academics. Inclusion education classrooms provide special education students a number of benefits that cannot be ignored, and inclusion is often viewed as a setting where special education students can improve their academic skills, as well as “including the increased opportunity for social interactions with nondisabled peers, the possibility of developing friendships, the gains in communication, social, and adaptive behavior skills, and the
participation in age-appropriate activities that may enhance social competence” (McCurdy & Cole, 2014, pp. 883). One of the main benefits to the inclusion settings is that students with disabilities can flourish academically in an inclusive classroom where they might not flourish otherwise (Perles, 2012). Teachers using successful strategies can provide these students with the supports and instructional methods they need to be successful academically. When general education teachers recognize and utilize instructional interventions that provide support and benefits for special education students, such as peer support, this can assist in meeting students’ academic needs, which can lead to academic gains in the classroom (McCurdy & Cole, 2014).

**Behavioral.** Special education students benefit socially as they are integrated with their non-disabled peers in a general classroom (Perles, 2012). These social benefits can include long lasting friendships, and those friendships can subsequently help provide valuable social relationship skills that these students may have otherwise never had the opportunity to experience. Their non-disabled peers can serve as role models for social integrations, which can help students with disabilities learn from those interactions. According to Westwood and Graham (2003), teachers indicated that inclusion classes also impact non-disabled students because these students then become more accepting and encouraging of special education students.

The transition from segregated schools to the general education classrooms was gradual. This transition involved significant effort, time, and stakeholder input to change how schools managed students with disabilities. Many of these changes involved changing the laws that govern schools and court decisions that required schools to make changes.

**Legislative Acts that Oversee Special Education**
Prior to EAHCA, state laws permitted school districts to turn away students with disabilities from public schools based on justification that those students were unable to be educated (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). After EAHCA was passed, no school could simply turn away students with disabilities. When the American with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990, it outlawed discriminatory practices toward individuals with disabilities by places of employment, public accommodations, modes of transportation, and telecommunications. Thus, in conjunction with IDEA, states now had aid in complying with their obligations to provide public education to students with disabilities.

Numerous federal legislative rulings mandated support and services for students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), including the Training of Professional Personnel Act (1959), which called for training of program administrators and teachers of children with disabilities; Captioned Films Acts (1958), which supported the production of accessible films; Teachers of the Deaf Act (1961), which trained instructional staff of deaf or hard of hearing students; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), and the State Schools Act (1965), which provided grant assistance to states to help educate children with disabilities.

IDEA, however identified the critical components that schools use to identify and serve these students (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Students must be appropriately evaluated before decisions can be made on a student’s special education placement and parents must be involved in those decisions and provide consent for testing. Students receive an Individualized Education Program (IEP) detailing the student’s goals, services, and placement. The student’s placement also cannot be changed with another meeting by the IEP team, and must be guided by the concept of Least Restrictive Environment. As stipulated by IDEA, through the child
find/zero reject component, school districts are required to identify all eligible students within their boundaries who have disabilities; once identified, these students are to be served with special education services (Bateman & Cline, 2016). Supplemental aids and services, as well as other related services, must be provided within the general classrooms to the best possible degree, and confidentiality of the student and their information must be guaranteed (Bateman & Cline, 2016; Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). IDEA established parent rights for their child’s education, and what parents can do under the law (Bateman & Cline, 2016). These rights include the right to request their child be assessed, be a team member on their child’s IEP team, file complaints with the state, receive regular reports of their child’s progress in their academics and special education goals, access the records of their child, and request the school provide an explanation of any documents or records kept on their child.

**Theoretical Framework**

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs proposes that individuals have certain needs that must be met in a particular order, which are motivated by specific needs, before those individuals can maximize their potential (Burton, 2012; Heylighen, 1992). Maslow’s theory was focused on a hierarchy of five areas of need - physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The tenet of this theory was to guide and understand human motivation (McLeod, 2016).

Maslow formed a hierarchy of needs that indicates motivation for an individual’s behavior. Until basic needs can be met, other needs cannot be met (Heylighen, 1992). The stage that is “active” is the stage that is motivating an individual’s behavior at a particular time, and once that specific need has been met, then that stage is no longer “active” and the individual has progressed to the next stage of need. Physiological needs correspond to what the body needs,
such as air, food, and water. This stage motivates an individual to maintain health and preserve life. The need for safety motivates an individual to avoid danger and potential harm. Love and belonging corresponds to basic social motivations that prompt individuals to seek out others for contact and positive relationships. The need for gratification or self-esteem motivates individuals to be acknowledged by others for their accomplishments. The final state, self-actualization, represents a person’s need for continuous improvement in order to realize his/her potential.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs serves as a framework to understand how teachers can realize their optimum potential when instructing special education students. Before Maslow developed his theory, psychology was studied from both the human psychopathology and behavioral psychology perspectives (Kožnjak, 2017). Maslow, who began as an experimental behaviorist, began considering behaviorism as only one component of human nature. Maslow sought to reconcile both areas while encompassing the positive characteristics of human nature and human potential. Accordingly, Maslow published his theory on human motivation and personality, which stipulated that human behavior is motivated by innate needs and the highest form of human motivation was for an individual to maximize his/her potential. For instance, a builder must build, a chef must cook, and a teacher must teach. For this study, I suggest that the needs of general education teachers must be met so they may make continuous improvement to themselves and their instructional abilities to realize their potential as teachers. Just as certain needs have to be met to motivate an individual, so teachers’ needs must also be met to allow these teachers the opportunity to realize their potential and actualize continuous improvement.

**Maslow’s as Framework for Teachers**
Maslow’s theory guides individuals to achieve their fullest potential, or self-actualization, by meeting their needs in a certain order; each area of need motivating an individual’s behavior to be met before the individual can fulfill the next area of need (McLeod, 2016). Maslow’s Hierarchy, which typically emphasizes an individual’s motivation, can be adapted to many different areas and fields where there is a need to motivate individuals in a setting. Currently, it is being used in schools and major business organizations (Kaur, 2013). Educational psychology, of which Maslow’s Theory of Motivation is one component, holds an ever-increasing importance in teacher training, due to the assumption that teachers and preservice teachers who have had training in educational psychology will better hold the tools and knowledge to instruct an ever-increasing diversity of students. In an effort to help teachers gather these tools, the National Academy of Education (2005) published a set of skills and knowledge that they determined teachers should know to be effective teachers (Patrick, Anderman, Bruening, & Duffin, 2011). These skills and this knowledge would help teachers understand what their students need to learn, how those students learn, and how those students develop over time.

Maslow’s beliefs are often applicable to education and are commonly utilized in schools. His theory is used as a guiding tool to fulfill the basic needs of students, so they may have a better chance of success in school. According to Burleson and Thoron (2017), Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs emphasizes meeting students’ needs for safety, food, and positive school relationships to show that students are valued and that their achievements are recognized. Maslow’s theory is often promoted as a positive tool to prompt discussion regarding addressing students’ needs (Desautels, 2014; Faisal, 2016; Noltemeyer, Bush, Patton, & Bergen, 2012). For instance, Noltemeyer, Bush, Patton, & Bergen (2012) detailed how students’ deficiency needs can have an impact on the academic and behavioral growth of students. In a more direct
representation of addressing student needs, providing opportunities for partner work, celebrations, community activity, and establishing an identity exemplify the belonging stage (Desautels, 2014). These examples provide an opportunity for students to connect with each other and communicate socially, thus an opportunity to fulfill this motivational need.

However, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs has also been used to apply to teachers needs as well, though there have been few adaptations of Maslow’s theory regarding identifying teacher needs as detailed below in Figure 2.2. Cannon (2013) attempted to adapt the hierarchy to the needs of teachers working in an urban community center, and Fisher and Royster (2016) worked to adapt the hierarchy of needs based on interviews with math teachers to identify ways to reduce teacher stress and improve retention.

![Figure 2.2. Teacher Adapted Hierarchies of Needs](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs</th>
<th>Cannon’s Adapted Hierarchy</th>
<th>Fisher and Royster’s Adapted Hierarchy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Physiological               | • Need for classrooms, equipment, paychecks, and staff | • Specialized professional development unique to their content area and better college courses  
                              |                                            | • Basic physical needs such as naps and exercise |
| Safety                      | • Procedures to ensure physical and emotional safety | • Higher salaries, more time for grading, health benefits, and retirement |
| Belonging                   | • Frequent and effective communication between teachers and building leaders | • Support system  
                              |                                            | • Being around others, their families, and through their religion |
| Esteem                      | • Recognition for strengths and accomplishments  
                              | • Identified the need for more professional respect  
                              | • Build on their skills to develop competence and mastery through performance reviews and positive feedback from their supervisors |

Figure 2.2 identified the stages of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and compares two adapted hierarchies focused on teacher needs (Cannon, 2013; Fisher and Royster, 2016).
It is important to note that these adapted hierarchies were not created for general education teachers who instruct special education students. However, research from Royster (2016) and Cannon (2013) can be used to support the concept that the needs of general education teachers must be met before needs of special education students can be met. The physiological stage, for instance, does not directly apply to body’s needs as in Maslow’s Hierarchy. In Cannon’s adapted hierarchy, the physiological needs are argued to be the most “basic needs” that a teacher needs in order to instruct students, and run the classroom; which includes classroom equipment, and appropriate staff. Fisher and Royster also argue that the physiological needs in Maslow’s Hierarchy connects with a teacher’s basic needs for “survival or, better yet, the subsistence” that teachers needs to complete or “survive” their jobs (2016, pg. 12).

These studies indicate that general education teachers must have certain needs fulfilled before they can be motivated and confident in being able to meet the needs of their students. Confidence in their abilities, teachers’ self-esteem, and their resulting self-efficacy has an impact on their instructional and management abilities (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Zee & Kooman, 2016). When teachers have the opportunity to develop their teaching and instructional abilities, those teachers will become more confident (Valazza, 2011). For general education teachers to improve their confidence, those opportunities involve increasing their self-awareness and better recognizing their strengths and weaknesses.

**Maslow’s Stage of Esteem and Impact on Teacher Performance**

In this section, I will scrutinize Maslow’s stage of esteem and the theoretical connection between teacher’s self-confidence and self-efficacy. According to Heylighen (2012) and Mbuya (2016), Maslow’s stage of esteem correlates to the self-confidence and achievement of individuals and directly impacts teachers’ motivations, attitudes, and behaviors by being
acknowledged by others for their accomplishments and skills. In a 2015 study, Khan, Fleya, and Quazi examined the role of self-esteem and general self-efficacy for teachers in primary schools. They stipulated that a teacher’s self-efficacy is affected by a teacher’s self-esteem, which would impact the teacher’s performance in instruction. Self-esteem is defined as individual self-evaluation, and thus is an important aspect of a teacher’s job satisfaction and job performance.

Stewart (2015) noted that teaching capability, higher student-achievement, and stronger relationships with students positively impacts a teacher's self-esteem. When an individual has a positive self-esteem, it fosters a positive self-image, which leads to an individual having self-efficacy (Khan, Fleva, & Qazi, 2015). The individual’s level of self-efficacy influences an individual’s choice of task, efforts in a task, persistence, resilience, and ability to achieve. Thus self-esteem leads to self-efficacy, which subsequently determines a teacher’s performance in the classroom.

Teachers with low self-esteem will demonstrate a lack of positive self-image in a manner that expresses a deep dissatisfaction with their job situation (Mocheche, Bosire, & Raburu, 2017). This dissatisfaction is demonstrated through a lower commitment to their job performance and ultimately a greater risk of leaving the teaching profession altogether. These teachers tend to model decreased self-efficacy, poor relationships with students, and minimal instructional success. Teachers who expressed a lower self-confidence in their abilities identified as being unsure of what to say or how to act when faced with certain situations.

Although this study was conducted in Kenya, it does minimize the premise that teachers in certain situations felt less confident in their abilities, exhibited a lower self-esteem, and expressed uncertainty in those same situations. While these needs applied to teachers in Kenya, it can be assumed that this study is applicable irrespective of setting. It can be then inferred that
general education teachers may feel uncertain in situations where they lack confidence in their teaching abilities, which would negatively impact job performance. Therefore, it can be inferred that the general education teachers detailed in Mocheche, Bosire, & Raburu’s study (2017) who were uncertain in knowing and recognizing how to respond in various situations, exhibited lower self-esteem due to not having their needs met.

Canon (2013) stated that teachers need opportunities to improve their skills and develop confidence through performance reviews and positive feedback. While this study was not directly focused on teachers who work with special education students, the assertion that teachers need opportunities to improve their skills and confidence levels could theoretically hold true for teachers of special education students. Kuster, Orth, and Meir (2013) determined that low self-esteem leads to poor professional function, lower job satisfaction, and less success at work. Conversely, high self-esteem fosters success. A positive self-esteem can reduce negative behaviors, whereas a low self-esteem can lead to social avoidance and withdrawal from others. Subsequently, this may increase the likelihood of a loss of practical and emotional support form colleagues and supervisors and negatively impact job performance.

Research into self-esteem and self-efficacy and the resulting impact on teachers supports that there is a strong connection between the two concepts, with each concept impacting the other. Positive outcomes from this connection are noted and detailed in this study. For example, teachers who embrace growth, seek knowledge, and acquire empowering behaviors in a proactive manner may see their self-esteem rise (Wang, Zhang, & Jackson, 2013). Subsequently, this may impact their self-efficacy in the classroom. Five areas of organizational climate were identified that can lead to this empowerment – professional collaboration, shared decision-making, evaluation and praise, professional growth, and positive leadership. When teachers have
a high self-esteem, they have confidence in their abilities, which is demonstrated through an awareness of their strengths, learning from mistakes, and a cooperative attitude. These teachers model exemplary examples of professional competence and teaching skills (Mocheche, Bosire, & Raburu, 2017). A positive self-efficacy helps assures individuals they are up to challenging tasks and helps them view challenges as something to be overcome as opposed to quitting when faced with failure (Bandura, 1994).

The research detailed in this chapter, as well as the impact of self-esteem, directly applies to the confidence of general education teachers regarding their abilities to effectively instruct special education. Research critiques and analysis of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the effects of self-esteem serve as the basis for this research. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is applicable in many aspects of an individual’s life, and the impact of self-esteem on job performance cannot be understated. Thus, each of these components is essential to this study.

The connections between a teacher’s self-esteem and his/her self-efficacy significantly influence classroom performance and interactions with special education students. In the next section, the various inclusion models used in general education classrooms will be detailed. Each model impacts the level of interaction between general education teachers and special education students.

**Models of an Inclusive Classroom**

Elliott and McKinney (1998) stipulated that after the EAHCA was passed, schools and teachers began to pursue new strategies to better educate students with disabilities. Special education teachers who were previously located in separate schools for students with disabilities began to serve students in general education classrooms via the concept of inclusion. Four primary methods of inclusion can be used to serve special education students in general
education classrooms – consultation, team teaching, aide services, and limited pullout services.

Figure 2.3, shown below details various inclusion models.

### Figure 2.3. Four Inclusion Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Consultation                 | • Special education teachers meet with general education teachers outside of class  
                                 | • Discuss student needs and possible adaptations  
                                 | • No direct services by special education teachers |
| Team Teaching (co-teaching)   | • Dual instruction from the special education teacher and general education teachers (Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015) | |
| Aide Services                | • Trained aides accompany special education students in the classroom to assist with student needs  
                                 | • Monitor student progress, and report to special education teacher |
| Limited Pull-out             | • Special education students are pulled from the classroom to receive instruction for specific areas of need (academic subject, social skills, etc.). |

Figure 2.3 summarizes the four inclusion models found in schools (Elliott and McKinney, 1998; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015).

The four models detailed above represent the models found in schools with special education students. Team teaching, or the co-teaching model, is the most commonly found, and is the preferred model to be used in an inclusive classroom.

The team teaching model is the ideal method of inclusion because it is best utilized in the least restrictive environment of the general education classroom (Elliott & McKenney, 1998).

Five structures are utilized to provide instruction. They are: one teach-one assist, station...
teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching. Each is detailed below in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4. Team Teaching Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different Structures of Team Teaching</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Teach – One Assist</td>
<td>• General education teachers do the primary teaching while the special education teacher assists students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station Teaching</td>
<td>• Teachers divide the curriculum into different contents and each teacher is responsible for providing specific content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel Teaching</td>
<td>• Both teachers planning together, but working with different groups during class time to deliver the same content at the same time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Teaching</td>
<td>• General education teachers instruct the majority of students while the special education teachers work with a small group of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Teaching</td>
<td>• Both teachers instruct at the same time and share student instruction on an equal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.4 summarizes the 5 models of team teaching (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Chamberger, 2010; Shaffer & Thomas, 2015; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012).

The confidence of a general education teacher may influence the structure and teaching environment of the classroom. Teacher beliefs regarding special education students, as well as teacher confidence and/or attitude toward special education students, may impact instruction (Cassady, 2011). Therefore, teacher confidence could influence classroom instructional design.
For instance, it is feasible that the teacher may only want to provide instruction to students they are confident in teaching and delegate instruction of special education students to the special education teacher.

The following section scrutinizes teacher attitudes relating to the integration of special education students into the general education classroom. The integration of special education students is of particular importance to this study because teacher beliefs regarding special education students may determine teacher confidence and self-efficacy. Teachers who hold certain attitudes about special education students may discover that those attitudes influence their instruction and interaction with special education students.

**Varying Attitudes Regarding Integration of Special Education Students**

It has been noted that the perceptions of various school stakeholders vary regarding which students are most likely to succeed in general education classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). It has been suggested that the nature of a student’s disability may have a bearing on the perceived learning capabilities of the students. Additionally, it has stipulated that the attitudes regarding integration differed by how much ‘distance’ there was between the classrooms and those making the recommendations for integration. For instance, where administrators and those overseeing the schools may have a positive attitude regarding integration and set the tone for having special education students in the general classrooms, teachers and those closer to the classrooms may be more hesitant and cautious about the integration of special education students.

Those more invested in special education students, such as special education teachers and/or teachers in support centers, may be more positive about including special education students in the general inclusive classroom, which may differ from the general education
teachers. There are differing results about the effectiveness of integrating special education students into the general education classrooms and a resulting link to teacher attitudes. However, it is noteworthy that a lack of positive teacher attitude may come from a lack of understanding of special education students’ disabilities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). In like manner, a lack of positive attitude may result from teachers’ perceptions of how special education students are added to their classrooms and the impact of special education students in these classrooms. Thus, this may affect teachers’ attitudes regarding integration. Samuels (2017) reported that when special education students are integrated into the general education classroom, the amount of teaching time decreases. Educators in multiple countries were surveyed, and results indicated that teachers who had special education students placed in their classrooms received less training and were less experienced. This may have impacted the ability of these teachers to help students stay focused on academics.

According to Avramidis & Norwich (2002), results from other studies indicated that integration is done without necessary modifications to the school’s organization, without recognizing teacher expertise or a lack thereof, and without any guarantee of potentially needed professional development. North Cooc stated that the current drive for the integration of special education students is outpacing the availability of teachers trained to teach students with disabilities (Samuels, 2017); which may lead to teachers feeling ill-prepared and ill-equipped to instruct special education students. School administrators are overseeing the drive to integrate special education students in the class, so they are in the best position to help improve teacher attitudes regarding integration. According to Riehl (2009), a principal has the power to define a situation and its meaning. A principal has the ability to impact teacher beliefs regarding support or lack of support by fostering new understandings about the changes that occur in the
classroom. School administrators may sometimes be unaware of issues that arise from new programs. In many cases, these issues could be resolved via discussion with teachers. For instance, a program may be emphasized that benefits one group of students, but the goal or mission of that program may contradict the goal or mission of other programs and structures at the school.

**Specific Literature Relating to the Current Study**

According to Rozenwing (2009), a 2004 amendment to IDEA impacted the responsibilities of general education teachers toward special education students. General education teachers may have been somewhat unprepared for this amendment, which essentially made general education teachers solely accountable for special education students being educated in general education classrooms. This amendment mandated that general education teachers be present, participate in IEP meetings, and prepare special education students for state and district assessments. General education teachers are also more accountable for students in inclusion classrooms, although these general education teachers have had little instructional training on how to better serve inclusive students. General education teachers are now being asked to provide, use, and implement different intervention strategies for special education students depending on the needs of these students. For many teachers, this is problematic because teachers often lack the necessary knowledge or comfort levels to implement effective strategies.

If general education teachers are unprepared for certain job requirements, this may indicate their lack of knowledge and/or skills when working with special education students. Subsequently, this may indicate that their needs in these areas are not being met. Their knowledge and skills needs maybe being met in other aspects of their education profession, but
not in the context of meeting the needs of their special education students. Thus, the preparation programs that resulted in lack of knowledge and skills for these teachers can be questioned.

**General Teacher Preparation Programs**

With the increase in the number of identified special education students, undergraduate teacher preparation programs are facing increased scrutiny, notably the preparation these programs offer for general education teachers to work with special education students. Many general education teachers asserted that they did not receive adequate training to work with special education students, implement modifications, and differentiate instruction (Guerra, 2014). According to Marin (2014), general education teachers indicated a need for improved teacher education programs that would foster better instruction of special education students. When preservice teachers participated in a study of how two special education courses impacted those individual’s level of comfort and knowledge of special education students, the teacher candidates noted that they felt more knowledgeable and comfortable about working with special education students after taking the two courses (Rakap, Cig & Parlak-Rakap, 2017). It was noted that these courses, similar to other teacher preparation programs, were more introductory courses and lacked a significant hands-on component. These introductory courses, however, are generally short-term and not extensive in their preparation. Boe, Shin, & Cook (2007) reported that, on average, the teacher preparation practice teaching experiences for some programs are 10 or more weeks, while other programs may be only five to nine weeks, or even less; and that the more extensive training opportunities were more major-specific regarding the level of training received. General education teachers in this study were asked to describe and provide information about their preparation programs via reflections. Additionally, these teachers were
asked to share stories about their experiences in these programs, as well as students with whom they have worked.

When the teacher candidates had more experience and interactions with special education students, their willingness and general attitude regarding these students was more positive. Beyond more introductory courses, Sobel, Iceman-Sands, & Basile (2007) described the coursework required by general education teachers regarding special education students to relate more broadly to the legislative and philosophical concepts and practicing the foundations of including students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. Gately and Hammer (2005) noted that most teacher preparation programs are divided into specific program tracks for general education teachers and special education teachers, with little overlap or awareness of the needs of each type of teacher. For instance, it has been determined that some professors in general education teacher programs lacked knowledge of best practices regarding how to properly serve special education students, even though teachers should be aware of these practices. This is more prevalent at the secondary level as opposed to the elementary level.

As teachers have reported minimal training for special education students (Guerra, 2014) and needing improved training programs, including more than just two introductory courses (Marin, 2014; Rakap, Cig & Parlak-Rakap, 2017), this would possibly indicate that teachers may be underprepared for a special education population in their classrooms. Thus, these teachers may be more uncomfortable and uncertain about working as an inclusion teacher to due to a lack of training (Gately & Hammer, 2005).

It was noted earlier that many teacher preparation programs are designed with separate tracks for general education teachers and special education teachers. Voltz and Elliot, Jr. (1997) described collaboration between the general education programs and special education programs
as being fairly limited. They found that one way to strengthen areas of weakness in teacher preparation programs was to increase collaboration between special education programs and general education programs. By improving collaboration between these two disciplines, teachers in both disciplines can communicate more effectively regarding special education students, which enhances the effectiveness of teacher education programs. According to Forlin and Chambers (2011), teacher programs focused on positive attitudes toward special education students and their inclusion in general education classrooms resulted in general education teachers offering more support for special education teachers.

Teacher preparation programs appear to serve as a basis for a teacher’s knowledge about his/her students; general education programs focus on non-disabled students and special education tracks focus on knowledge about special education students. Potential problems that may result from this type of preservice program is the amount of special education knowledge that general education teachers may possess and whether they have the necessary amount of knowledge to properly instruct their students.

**Extent of Special Education Knowledge**

Kamens, Loprete, and Slostad (2000) found that general education teachers believed that preservice teacher preparation programs should increasingly emphasize the legal and technical aspects of special education. Many of these teachers noted that a general overview of special education was insufficient preparation, and they emphasized that preparation programs should focus on educating teachers about the legalities of special education and how these legalities impact the classroom. Additionally, a greater emphasis on legal terminology and special education procedures should also be considered. The most interesting aspect of this study was that the areas of preservice programs that needed the most improvement were areas identified by
the participants of the study. Rather than provided questionnaire or survey and rating different areas of education, the participants identified necessary areas of improvement, based on their experiences. Similar to the design of this current study, Kamens, Loprete, and Slostad (2000) used teachers’ experiences and written comments to determine which additional improvements were needed and what areas of preparation programs required the most focus for future teachers.

Teachers have expressed that their initial education programs were lacking in the details of special education terminology and legalities, thus further scrutiny is needed to determine why teacher education programs did not provide these teachers with the necessary instruction and information to better assist special education students. Teachers have also expressed that teacher preparation programs do not provide adequate experience and knowledge for teachers to develop strategies for special education students (Brown, Welsh, Hill, & Cipko, 2008). In like manner, these programs do not sufficiently prepare these teachers to properly utilize classroom materials or assess student learning. However, teachers who received additional instruction on special education adaptations might be more able to develop and provide more appropriate interventions and adaptations for special education students than those teachers who did not receive additional instruction. Brown, Welsh, Hill, & Cipko (2008) demonstrated the recognition that current preservice education programs are lacking in fundamental skills that general teachers need. Student teachers involved in this study may have only enrolled in education courses that focused on specific special education skills. Without those courses, these teachers may have failed to recognize they were missing a significant skill set until they began their teaching careers. At that point, this lack of knowledge may have been increasingly consequential.

How much a teacher knows about a subject or population group will influence his/her interaction with those groups, and the same holds true for special education students. Teachers
that believe they are unprepared or possess limited knowledge of special education students may approach these students with a different attitude. The effects of a teacher’s attitude toward special educational on his/her interaction and instruction with special education students will be subsequently detailed. A teacher’s attitude may influence his/her ability to adapt to a new special education student coming into the classroom or his/her ability to collaborate with other teachers to improve their skills and knowledge in specific areas of weakness.

**Teacher Attitude Toward Special Education Students**

**Adapting to the Situation.** General education teachers’ attitudes significantly impact how these teachers instruct special education students (Think Inclusive, 2015). According to Sharma and Sokal (2016), general education teachers that exhibit positive attitudes toward inclusion are typically characterized by their interactions with special education students, whereas teachers who hold negative attitudes regarding inclusion are less likely to foster success in inclusive classrooms. Teachers were found to have a less favorable attitude of special education students in the inclusive classroom if those students had high levels of need. Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmon (2009) noted that teachers’ attitudes impact their instructional skills. Teachers who are student-focused are able to use their instructional time more effectively, regardless of students’ specific needs. Additionally, the perceived responsibilities of those students with special education teachers and/or the perceived responsibilities of both general education teachers and special education teachers may impact the effectiveness of inclusion classrooms. Teachers who assumed responsibility for instructing special education students in the inclusive classroom are more likely to offer effective instruction and intervention and work effectively with their special education students.
Attitudes of general education teachers toward special education students can be shaped during teacher preparation programs (Sharma & Sokal, 2015). Depending on the focus of course offerings in teacher preparation programs, general education teachers may develop a preconceived perception of special education students that can impact their beliefs on inclusion. Courses that offer more instruction regarding educational strategies for special education students are more likely to positively impact the perceptions of general education teachers toward special education students than courses that solely emphasize the medical and technological components of special education (Rakap, Cig, & Parlak-Rakap, 2017). How often a teacher interacts with special education students, and the nature of those contacts, are keys to creating a positive teacher acceptance of inclusion and students with disabilities in their classroom.

If a teacher struggles to adapt to a new situation, then the perceived next step may be to communicate with others who are more knowledgeable. However, if a teacher’s attitude is influencing his/her interactions with a certain population, then those same attitudes may influence his/her desire or ability to communicate and collaborate with other teachers. General education teachers’ issues regarding their willingness or inability to collaborate with others will be detailed as part of this research.

The studies discussed in this section appear to highlight and work within the framework of Maslow’s Hierarchy. If teachers are not focused on what they do not know, then they are only minimally concerned about their perceived skills. Thus, they are dedicated to instructing their special education students and it may be assumed the motivational needs of these teachers have been met. It may also be assumed these teachers have necessary skills to meet the needs of their students, irrespective of the situation. Additionally, if general education teachers completed
courses that emphasized instructional strategies and early interactions with students with disabilities, as opposed to philosophy regarding special education students, then it is reasonable to assume that these teachers may have had some of their instructional needs met because these teachers would be better prepared to instruct special education students.

**Collaborating with Others.** Collaborating with others is essential for teachers, and this section scrutinizes the importance of collaborating with others as a specific teacher need through the lens of Maslow’s beliefs. If teachers’ instructional and skill development needs are not met, this could foster a lack of knowledge that impacts teachers’ perceptions of special education students. Consequently, this may prompt a negative stereotype of students with disabilities.

Collaboration is sometimes problematic for both general education teachers and special education teachers because they often only interact with others in the same subject areas and specialty areas (Rutherford, 2007). Lack of collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers leads to instructional models that do not best assist the special education students, with some general education teachers expecting the special education teachers to serve as assistants or to pullout students and work at a separate table. It was determined that successful teacher teams shared expertise and knowledge, while teams that collaborated less often struggled with differences in teaching styles, which prompted conflict (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Collaboration is essential if teachers are to effectively work with one another. Thus, collaboration is a specific teacher need that should be met. A lack of collaboration skills may indicate that this need is not being met during the early stages of the teacher’s education.

According to Kamens, Loprete, and Slostad (2010), an inability to collaborate with teachers in other subject areas, disciplines, and grade levels may take effect as early as preservice
teacher preparation programs. Their study of teachers’ written responses found that general education teachers believed there should be increased preparation in six different areas of teachers’ preservice programs for teachers to feel more confident and comfortable with special education students, including co-teaching and collaboration with others. If these collaboration needs are not being met, then it can be assumed that teachers do not have a positive understanding of special education students, may not be able to collaborate with others to determine the best way to meet the needs for their students, or be able to learn new skills to better improve their own abilities. The identification for preparation for co-teaching and collaboration with others could develop a more positive attitude regarding special education students. Teachers should learn how to communicate and work effectively with special needs teachers, other professionals in the classroom, and co-teach with special education teachers.

Pellegrio, Weiss, and Regan (2015) suggested that some general education teachers’ difficulty in collaborating stems not from unwillingness to collaborate, but rather a lack of skills needed to successfully collaborate with different individuals. Some university teaching programs are including instructors with both special education backgrounds and general education backgrounds. However, collaboration is not necessarily a critical component of these programs. Thus, even recent graduates who may be willing to collaborate may be unaware of how to do so. Veteran teachers may not have developed the necessary collaboration skills with special education teachers and may be unable to change their teaching styles after many years.

These previous studies are useful in highlighting problematic issues regarding teacher collaboration. It should be noted that these studies are derived from teachers from a wide range of disciplines and geographical areas. These studies do not appear to consider personal experiences that may have impacted the difficulty of collaboration, such as a lack of emphasis on
collaboration during a college preparation course or a bad experience that may have occurred as part of collaboration. Additionally, these studies do not emphasize the teacher population used for this research. Instead, the responses seem to be a more generalized reporting of data.

By examining teacher attitudes regarding their interactions and instruction of special education students, it can give insight to the origins of these behaviors. It is feasible that teacher attitude may correlate with their confidence levels when working with a particular group of students. A lack of confidence may influence their self-efficacy and classroom instruction.

Confidence and Self-Efficacy Defined

Confidence is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as having a feeling of little doubt about one’s abilities (2017). Confidence significantly impacts all teachers. Confidence in their own abilities guides teacher instruction and affects teacher success (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006). Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin defined teacher self-efficacy as an individual’s belief in his/her capabilities (2013). A teacher’s self-efficacy impacts teacher choices, goal-setting, how teachers handle adversity, levels of stress in unfamiliar settings, and classroom decisions.

Teacher Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Impact on Instructional Abilities. Teachers who lack confidence in themselves and their abilities are less than effective as classroom instructors (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006). Zee and Kooman (2016) found that teacher self-efficacy impacts general education teachers’ instructional planning, skill development, and the willingness to change instructional approaches and practices. Teachers with low self-efficacy are likely to be more stressed and emotionally exhausted. These teachers may have a lower sense of job satisfaction and commitment to their job.
Kunusting, Neuber, and Lipowsky (2016) found that teacher self-efficacy could predict the classroom climate and instructional quality by examining teachers’ mastery goals. Teachers with low self-efficacy are more likely to promote a less supportive environment. Instructional quality of these teachers is more likely to be static because these teachers either do not establish goals for improvement or do not strive to reach goals they have previously created. Students in the classroom, and especially special education students, need continuous monitoring of their academic progress, which would be used to establish academic goals for those students. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that teachers with low self-efficacy are unlikely to establish academic or behavioral improvement goals for their special education students. These goals would be focused on meeting the unique needs of their students and helping to provide improvement to those students’ skill-deficit areas. In the absence of these goals, a general education teacher may be unaware of how to develop instruction for special education students.

Teachers with high self-efficacy will be more diligent and will hold themselves accountable for their own actions and the progress of their students (Khan, Fleva, & Qazi, 2015). When teachers believe something is within their control, they also believe they can significantly impact circumstances and influence outcomes. If a special education student is struggling in class, teachers with high self-efficacy will attempt to resolve issues instead of attributing student struggles to the student’s disability and determining that the student cannot be taught. Therefore, teachers with high self-efficacy will meaningfully impact student academic success because these teachers perceive that all students have the capacity to learn.

**Impact on Special Education Students’ Learning.** According to Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2012) general education teachers’ perceptions of their abilities to instruct special education students can significantly impact students’ educations. Teacher self-efficacy is the
primary indicator of the individual teacher’s attitude regarding the inclusion of special education students in his/her classroom. Low self-efficacy was related to increased anxiety and a reluctance to teach special education students in their classrooms. Conversely, teachers with a stronger self-efficacy were markedly more positive about inclusion students. This study’s framework, while scrutinizing general education teachers’ self-efficacy from another country, can be used to illustrate how self-efficacy can impact a teacher’s thoughts regarding selected student populations. Teachers who are described as having low self-efficacy are likely to spend more class time on non-academic tasks. Their instructional strategies for inclusion students are ineffective, which negatively impacts special education students’ learning.

According to Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Malinen (2011), teachers who believed more in their ability to implement inclusive practices successfully were more effective in meeting the needs of their students. These teachers were more impactful when implementing inclusive instructional students and motivating students who were not interested in their work.

Royster, Reglin, & Losike-Sedimo (2014), suggested that general education teachers in the inclusion classrooms may often have the perception that special education students should not be in the regular classrooms; primarily due to a lack of training. Consequently, these teachers began developing greater levels of frustration, with the teacher referring the students out of the classes; and more than likely, a decreased sense of confidence and self-efficacy in instructing students with disabilities. The perceived outcome of this outlook was that the teachers would rather have the students out of their classrooms as opposed to continuing to teach these students and working on meeting the needs of their students. After the teacher’s knowledge and skills were improved through professional development the teacher’s attitude and behaviors were more positive, and these teachers were more willing to instruct special education
students in the inclusion classes. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the teachers began feeling more confident in their ability to instruct special education students and were reported to be more comfortable in utilizing different instructional strategies to provide a higher level of instruction for these students. The final outcome would appear to indicate that teachers who feel more confident in instructing special education students may find that inclusion classrooms and inclusion students will benefit from better instruction and enhanced dedication.

This relationship between confidence/self-efficacy and their impacts on an inclusion classroom are important to note because it is apparent that teachers’ confidence in their instructional abilities declines if they do not have the knowledge they need. However, if the instructional knowledge needs of these teachers have been met, then a positive change in instruction and behaviors of the inclusion teachers is likely. Thus, it could be construed that teachers with a lower self-efficacy and confidence need to have their knowledge and skills needs met before they will be in a better position to meet the needs of their students. Teachers with a lower self-efficacy can be perceived as being less prepared and lacking specific needs required to meaningfully instruct special education students. Without those needs being met, teachers might end up feeling lost or uncertain as to how to properly instruct their students.

**Implications on Attitude and Referral Process.** A general education teacher’s self-efficacy is a predictor of individual teacher belief on the difficulty of instructing special education students and the frequency of special education referrals (Meijer, & Foster, 1988; Buell, Hallam, Gamel-Mccormick & Scheer, 1999). In a 1988 study, Meijer and Foster defined teacher self-efficacy as the degree to which an individual feels he/she can complete a course of action or resolve a situation. In their study, they identified *problem chance* and *referral chance* related to teacher self-efficacy, and teachers with low self-efficacy identified students with
disabilities as more likely to be referred for special education. Teachers with high self-efficacy were less likely to refer students for special education. These results might indicate that the teachers of the time viewed students with learning disabilities as being more difficult to instruct and referred these students to special education instead of focusing on interventions in the classroom. Teachers with lower self-efficacy and confidence in their abilities are more unwilling or unknowing how to best instruct struggling students in their classroom, therefore placing that student on the track for special education or determining that the special education students in the classroom are primarily the responsibility of the special education teacher.

Podell and Soodek (1993) argued that teacher self-efficacy also relates to the teacher’s belief in his/her ability to make a change in the students and his/her ability to overcome external influence on the student. Teacher self-efficacy relates to a teacher’s belief in his/her ability to change students in a meaningful manner and overcome external influences that may impact students. In a separate study, Soodek and Podell (1993) found that general teachers with low self-efficacy are less likely to consider regular education as an appropriate placement for special education students. Teacher self-efficacy significantly influences judgment regarding the appropriateness of general education placement for students with learning and behavioral problems. Teachers who believe they cannot adequately effect change in student outcomes do not consider the classroom and appropriate setting for these students (Podell, & Soodak, 1993). Soodak & Podell (2013) identified that teachers should be confident in their own abilities to teach and believe that their instruction will have a positive effect on the educational outcomes of special education students for these teachers to agree with inclusive placements.

Building a teacher’s confidence in his/her abilities is similar to the premise dictated by Maslow, which stipulates that basic needs must be met to subsequently motivate the individual
further. For instance, if a teacher is simply motivated by completing a job, he/she may not believe he/she can make a long-term difference in students’ lives. Therefore, these teachers may lack the necessary motivation to examine their own skills and make self-improvements. If a teacher lacks the necessary self-efficacy and confidence in his/her ability to meet student needs, it may be assumed that this teacher will be unwilling to instruct special education students. Instead, this teacher would likely prefer that special education students work with special education teachers who possesses the necessary knowledge to help these students.

Increasing Confidence/Self-Efficacy. To meet teachers’ needs and build their confidence, teachers need assistance in gaining the knowledge in skill areas they deem as deficient. As knowledge increases, teachers’ confidence in their abilities will grow, and confident teachers have a positive impact on student performance (Pride Learning Center, 2012). This confidence will have enhance instruction and help teachers meet the needs of special education students. Thus, continual improvement allows teachers to enhance self-efficacy.

According to Rosenzweig (2009), teachers can build self-confidence by acquiring knowledge. Professional development, improved preservice teacher programs, and mentoring and collaboration help increase teacher knowledge, which helps improve instructional skills and enables teachers to meet the needs of their students.

Althauser (2015) stipulated that for teachers to apply what they have learned, they must effectively practice these skills. Investigating and learning different subject matter does not necessarily coincide with effective teaching practice or improve self-confidence. Professional development opportunities and Professional Learning Communities are effective resources for teacher improvement. Professional development should help teachers analyze lessons and develop both content and pedagogical knowledge. Additionally, teachers should have skills and
strategies modeled and opportunities provided to practice the new strategies and skills.

Professional Learning Communities allow general education teachers to develop skills and enhance knowledge. PLCs promote a supportive, collaborative environment where teachers can continually learn from one another.

Research in this chapter details general methods teachers can utilize to increase their confidence and self-efficacy. Ideally, teacher insight detailed in this study may reveal effective methods of improving the confidence and self-efficacy of teachers when working with special education students. If a teacher has gained the necessary knowledge of various strategies and methods to motivate students and meet their instructional and academic needs, this would imply these teachers have reached a stage of motivation that allows them to examine their abilities and make adjustments and improvements. Thus, this would imply that the professional needs of these teachers, such as knowledge, professional development, skills, and attitude, have been realized.

Summary

Numerous changes in special education laws, including the implementation of inclusion, have increased educational opportunities for students with disabilities. In order for special education students to be served properly and have their educational/behavioral needs met, general education teachers must possess the necessary self-confidence to instruct these students. Thus, the fundamental needs of teachers must be met to allow these teachers to acquire the needed knowledge for effective instruction. Self-confidence allows general education teachers to work with special education students in a more effective manner. There are numerous benefits associated with inclusion, but these benefits cannot be realized unless general education teachers are able to meet the unique needs of their students.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

My intent with this study was to use general education teachers’ perspectives and experiences toward special education students in order to illustrate what helps teachers to become more confident and comfortable working with special education students; which in turn, may lead toward improving the teacher’s instruction for those students. For this reason, and because of the nature of collecting data from the teachers’ own perspectives, I chose to use a qualitative design for my study.

It was necessary to gather data on teachers’ thoughts, perspectives, and opinions because this study examined the self-confidence and self-efficacy of general education teachers and the abilities of these teachers to instruct special education students. Thus, a qualitative approach was utilized for this study. Qualitative research emphasizes finding the themes and relationships between variables in the study (Wise, 2017). This study focused on the relationship between general teacher’s confidence/self-efficacy and their ability to instruct special education students.

Phenomenology was the most appropriate qualitative method for this study. A phenomenological approach, which relies on the participants’ own perspectives to provide information and describe their experiences, is used in an attempt to understand an issue that an individual is experiencing (CIRT, 2017). A phenomenological approach provided focus for this study because it allowed the researcher to gather information on the thoughts, opinions, and
feelings of general education teachers. A phenomenological approach necessitated that general education teachers describe their experiences with special education students. These experiences may indicate how their experiences have influenced and impacted their confidence. Subsequently, these responses were analyzed in order to obtain data relative to the research questions stated in this study.

**Phenomenology and Qualitative Research**

This study utilized a phenomenology approach to use the experiences of teachers to answer the *hows* and *whys* of this study. Phenomenology is an effective form of qualitative research, which seeks to use findings to contribute to a deeper understanding of an individual’s experiences (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017). Phenomenology allows the participant to guide the direction of the findings as opposed to the researcher guiding the participants in the direction the researcher deems important.

Qualitative research may be about understanding someone’s motivation or uncovering thoughts and opinions and providing a focus on a particular problem; phenomenology, with its focus on first-person accounts, provides an unprecedented view into an individual’s life through that individual’s experiences and stories. Due to its emphasis on individual stories and experiences, phenomenology allows for a deeper, more complete, and more focused understanding of an individual’s experiences of a topic. Phenomenology focuses on using interview questions that elicits what the interviewee believes is most important to an experience; and this is done by not have a predetermined set of questions to ask about a topic (Sohn et al., 2017). Phenomenology dictates that the focus of the study is on the experiences of what is being studied, and not just on a specific group or population, because every individual will have different experiences and stories. Even those who have experienced the same phenomenon will
have different perspectives and stories that can enhance the meaning about a particular experience; the more varied the experiences and stories, the more complete the picture of the topic being studied will be. Thus, participants’ perception of what is most valuable to the experience being studied typically emerges during a phenomenology study, not a particular focus dictated by the researcher. Essentially, participants decide how to answer a researcher’s question.

**Research Participants and Setting for the Study**

Study participants were general education teachers in grades 1-5 who currently have special education students in their classrooms. These participants were chosen in order to ensure a wide range of opinions and experiences. This study was conducted in a rural, Title I elementary school in North Georgia. Teaching experience of study participants varied. Some study participants are at the beginning of their teaching careers, whereas others have been teaching for over 20 years. This study consisted of six general education teachers, all of who currently teach special education students in their classrooms for at least one academic period. In order to maintain anonymity, the participants are identified throughout this study using pseudonyms.

**Research Procedures**

The researcher informed the principal of the research school of the study’s purpose and processes. The researcher also detailed how the identities of study participants and the research school were to be kept confidential. Subsequently, the principal of the research school granted permission for the research to occur. Subsequently, potential study participants were notified by e-mail regarding the purpose of the study. Potential participants were also notified that their participation would be anonymous via use of informed consent (See Appendix A). Participants were asked to copy and paste a statement from the informed consent page and reply to the
researcher. In order to foster a culture of objectivity, no formal communication occurred regarding the researcher, other than information provided via informed consent. All official communication about the study was conducted through email. No informal conversation occurred regarding the study so that potential biases could be minimized or eliminated.

**Data Collection Procedures**

**Reflections.** Reflections were conducted to gather data on the thoughts and opinions of general education teachers. The reflections for this study used both forms of questioning; rating scales to indicate the confidence levels in instructing and managing students with disabilities, and open-ended questions for teachers to express their thoughts and opinions in written form (See Appendix B). Via these questions, general education teachers indicated their confidence levels, and expressed their opinions on whether they are being prepared to instruct special education students. One example question is: *Describe how confident you felt when first working with students with disabilities? What do you think influenced how confident you felt?*

The reflections were conducted via Survey Monkey, an online survey site, and the links were sent to the participating general education teachers by an e-mail mailing list. The mailing list ensured participant anonymity. The reflections, once completed, were submitted electronically to the researcher.

**Interviews.** After participants completed the reflections, follow-up interviews were scheduled. These interviews were conducted to provide more insight and personal experience, thus enhancing and clarifying reflection and questionnaire responses. Interviewees should be those individuals who were willing to be more honest and open with their experiences and stories (Turner, 2010). The participants were interviewed one time in an approximate 30min interview. The interview questions were primarily open-ended questions, designed to elicit unconstrained
descriptions of the teachers’ experience (Sohn et al., 2017). A typical interview question may direct the interviewee toward a specific topic, but the experiences and first-hand perspectives of the general education teachers were the desired responses from the interview questions. The use of open-ended questions allowed participants to communicate what they believed was most important to them. When conducting the interviews, arrangements were made through e-mail so that communication was constant and confidential; the e-mail account used for communication was password protected and only accessed by the researcher. All the interviews occurred in classrooms at certain times throughout the school day. For instance, interviews were conducted during planning or after-school times when students were not present. During the course of the interviews, the interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed at a later time for data analysis.

**Observations.** Observations are fundamental for being able to observe an individual’s nonverbal expressions, how he/she interacts with others, and how much time an individual spends on various activities (Kawulich, 2005). Observations of the six general education teachers allowed the researcher to gather additional data during and after the interviews. During the interviews, the researcher noted possible emotions and expressions that were evident among teachers during descriptions of experiences of special education students in their classrooms. In order to arrange time for the observations in the teachers’ classrooms, the general education teachers provided times of the day when working with special education students. Arrangements were made to ensure that the observations were conducted in a time and manner that did not negatively impact the classroom environment. During the observations, the researcher took notes focusing on the comments and themes that the general education teachers noted in their reflections and interviews. During the observations, the researcher attempted to document and
note behaviors that could be used to understand the teachers’ perspectives of their experiences and interactions with special education students.

**Securing the Data.** During this study, there was a need to ensure that all the collected data were secured so they were only accessible by the researcher. Accordingly, all data were stored on a password-secured external drive. When not in use, this drive was secured in a lockable safe, along with all notes, papers, and sheets with data analysis.

**Pilot Study**

For the purpose of this study, reflections and interviews were utilized to gather data from the general education teacher participants. In order to test the reflection and interview process, the researcher conducted a pilot study to determine if all the questions were written correctly and understood by the users. Conducting a pilot study involves having a small group of individuals, similar to target participants, complete surveys, interviews, and questionnaires prior to a study (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). For this pilot study, Kindergarten teachers were utilized for the pilot interview and reviewing the reflection questions because this grade group was not considered for research participation. It was documented in a research journal the thoughts and concerns going into and after the pilot interview.

When completing my pilot interview, it was surprisingly difficult to not ask follow up questions about information I wanted to know about. I was able to not ask specific questions, only focusing on terms and information the interviewee brought up, but it was still a challenge. Another thing I found difficult and uncomfortable going into the interview was that besides an opening question to start off the conversation, I felt more unprepared because I did not know specifically what the interviewee would bring up or talk about (Research Journal, 1/24/18).
By noting this concern, I was able to work with the University of Tennessee (UTK) phenomenology research group to better adapt and adjust the interview style. “I had my second real interview today, and using the feedback from the UTK group I modified my questions and how I asked them and I came away feeling much better about how the interview went. I felt that because of working with the group, I came away with knowledge that better helped me develop and conduct my interview” (Research Journal, 2/14/18). The pilot study was useful because it allowed me to better prepare for the research study and adjust and modify questions as necessary. No data from the pilot study was used or reported in the final study.

**Ethical Issues**

As in any study, there are any number of ethical issues that need to be addressed; these issues range from respect of privacy, avoiding misrepresentation, and establishing honest interactions (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). For this study, it was essential to ensure the confidentiality of all research participants. Accordingly, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to be used in any reporting of data. Additionally, all research participants were provided with an informed consent form that detailed the purpose of the study, the possible benefits of the study, research methods, and the procedures by which data would be kept confidential.

In order to ensure that my study was found to be trustworthy and transparent to the reader, all of the procedures for this study have been detailed to provide a clear description of the steps taken in this study. Essentially, an audit trail was created. The documentation of the research process in this methodology section, self-reflective journaling, and the analysis procedures have all been detailed. Similarly, justification has been provided for all processes used in this study. Accordingly, this has helped provide clarity and relevance to the study.
**Proposed Data Analysis**

After reviewing each data collection method for this Phenomenology study (reflections, interviews, and observations), I utilized the coding software MAXQDA to analyze the large amount of text data (from the open-ended reflection questions and interview transcripts) line-by-line to identify themes and areas that general teachers indicated through their responses. The themes and areas noted were identified by scrutinizing recurring patterns of words, phrases, or metaphors that were used by the study participants in their reflections and interviews (Sohn et al., 2017). The purpose of coding is to identify the broad themes and concepts that are revealed in the data, as well as identifying the specifics that relate to those themes. Coding software is designed to analyze these types of data (surveys and interview transcripts) for connections and insights (Crossman, 2017).

**Reflections.** Open Coding was utilized for initial analysis of the reflections completed by general education teachers. Open Coding begins the analysis process by showing the initial concepts and themes (Research Rundowns, 2017). These themes were derived from the general education teachers’ responses to the reflections and open-ended questions. The codes utilized revealed initial themes related to general education teacher confidence levels, why they are confident or lack confidence, and why they believe their needs have or have not been met. Each theme or concept was identified by using a multi-color coding system in order to separate the concepts and keep them easily identified as the researcher proceeded with interviews and observations. Initial themes from this analysis allowed the researcher to develop beginning reference framework of themes and concepts that would be also be revealed and validated through other areas of data collection. This triangulation of data, using multiple forms of data to study a topic, helped to establish the trustworthiness of the study and the subsequent results.
Interviews. The interview transcripts were coded using in vivo coding. This method of coding is used to identify “meaning units” or recurring words/phrases that may reveal themes to be examined (Sohn et al., 2017). Interview transcripts were analyzed to identify more specific topics and themes that the general education teachers believed were most important when discussing their experiences with special education students. I noted in my research journal when analyzing the first couple of interviews that I seemed to have expectations on what to find in the interview transcripts.

As I was analyzing the interviews, I noticed that I had this underlying expectation that each interview would all have similar components or talk about the same themes in the same way. I guess I just had this expectation that each teacher may have the same views about instructing special education students and would have similar focuses; which was not exactly true (Research Journal, 2/28/18).

By noting this in my journal, I was able to revisit my initial analysis and focus on what the general education teachers were communicating, and not for any specific topic.

The transcripts were reviewed for notable words or phrases from other written texts. These words or phrases were then assigned to a specific code to separate the different themes and concepts that emerged from the transcripts. These themes and concepts were assigned color-codes to help differentiate the different themes. These themes and concepts were then compared to the data collected from the reflections completed by the teachers in order to begin triangulating information. This triangulation occurred to either confirm or refute that similar information was being revealed in other data sources.

Observations. Selective coding enabled the researcher to relate classroom observations to previously identified themes and concepts from the reflections and interviews, specifically
regarding the confidence levels and current practices of general education teachers when working with special education students.

**Verification/Trustworthiness.** Numerous methods were utilized to verify the data and ensure trustworthiness. During the course of this study, I kept a reflective journal in which I documented my thoughts, feelings, and concerns about the study. Although I did not have a reflective journal prior to the beginning of the study, I referred back to my initial proposal and compared what I had written with what I was experiencing as I proceeded through the study. By focusing on self-reflection in the journal, similar to my bracket interview, this allowed me to help identify any biases or preconceptions during the study or helped to provide insight into issues that impacted how I proceeded with the study and whether changes were made to the procedures due to self-reflection. Making issues visible ensured they were no longer just thoughts; instead, they were concepts that could be reviewed and explored (Ortlipp, 2008). Excerpts of the journal were included in the final study report to ensure transparency of the study and procedures.

Peer debriefing was conducted at the beginning, during, and at the conclusion of the study. Peer debriefing calls for having a researcher and an uninvolved and unbiased peer meet and discuss the procedures for the study, as well as the analysis methods used to identify findings. The purpose of peer debriefing is to minimize bias (Spall, 1998). For this study, peers from the research school not involved in the study were utilized for peer debriefing. A bracket interview was also conducted with the researcher’s dissertation chair. After transcribing this bracket interview, the transcript was reviewed by the University of Tennessee (UTK) phenomenology research group and analyzed for researcher preconceptions. These preconceptions were identified to minimize or eliminate any researcher bias during the
interviews. Subsequently, a pilot interview was conducted, and the transcript was provided to the University of Tennessee phenomenology research group as another form of peer debriefing. “I did come away with a better understanding of the type of questions to ask to help guide and prompt the teacher to talk about their experience and how they felt about working with special education students” (Research Journal, 2/13/18). The research group members provided suggestions and guidance for modifying and adjusting questions for study interviews and subsequent coding, thus ensuring the trustworthiness of the data. The UTK phenomenology group further served as peer debriefers at various points during the study, thus helping to ensure the validity of gathered data by serving as a ‘check’ and providing an impartial viewpoint to review the procedures and analysis used in the study. This was noted in my research journal as a benefit after the last videoconference with the UTK group.

The videos conferences that I have had have consistently provided me with reliable insight into the data collected for my study. With the UTK group, there is both a wide range of perspectives and experiences to help draw out the deeper feelings from my data. I tend to think categorically, so this group has definitely helped me dig down deeper than I could have on my own. (Research Journal, 6/5/18)

By helping to review the procedures and data presented, this group provided insight regarding potential problems and suggested improvements.

Triangulation is accomplished by asking the same questions of all the study participants and collecting data through different sources (DeVault, 2017). In this study, the researcher utilized the same reflections for the various general education teachers, and the interview questions prompted the general teachers to discuss their experiences. For this research, triangulation occurred via the reflections, interviews, and observations of the general education
teachers. Member checks, which were also utilized for this study, require interview participants to review the analysis of transcripts from their interviews. Following the conclusion of the analysis of all forms of collected data (reflections, interviews, and observations), I met with the general education teachers who participated in the study. The UTK phenomenology group provided a thematic analysis of my bracket interview in a simplified form. Similarly, I reviewed my analysis with the participants, and they had the opportunity to confirm the findings and themes identified; as well as provide additional information, clarify remarks, or disagree with a finding or theme. Each participant confirmed the analysis of the collected data. After themes were identified from the analysis of the reflections, interviews, and observations of this study using vivo coding, the themes were returned to the UTK group to acquire their opinions regarding identified themes and to determine if the analysis correctly related the collected data and identified any erroneous analysis of the data. Subsequently, the UTK group served to provide feedback for an in-depth interpretation of the identified themes.

Detailed descriptions of context help ensure that the results of the study can be transferred and utilized in other settings or contexts (Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2006), and this was conducted for this study during the literature review and at the conclusion of the study by examining Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Specifically, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs was used as a framework to help teachers determine how to improve their confidence or help teachers become more confident regarding instruction of special education students. Thoroughly describing the research context and ideas that guide the study provides others with the opportunity to use the information found in the study in a different setting.

Limitations and Delimitations
**Delimitations.** This study was limited to general education teachers. Special education teachers were not included in this study because they are already familiar with special education students and know how to meet the unique behavior and educational needs of these students. Additionally, only teachers from grades 1-5 were included in this study. Pre-K and kindergarten teachers were not included in this study because the majority of preschoolers with disabilities are taught in self-contained classrooms, with students spending only a small amount of their day in the regular classrooms (SPeNSE, 2017). Additionally, kindergarten students are rarely identified with disabilities until at least well into the school year. Time constraints necessitated that the research be confined to one school.

**Limitations.** It was assumed that all participants would provide honest answers. However, it was feasible that some participants may have been uncomfortable. It was also possible that research participants may have provided answers that the researcher wanted to hear as opposed to answers that were entirely truthful. Potter and Hepburn (2005) opined that when individuals interact, they gravitate to stakes and interests that they deem important. In interviews, this can occur if interviewees answer questions and frame their responses to their perceived stakes and interests. If individuals has a disconnect from the topic being discussed, then their responses may focus more on their perceived stakes and interests and less on the topic of the interviewer’s questions. If those being interviewed a connection to the topic being discussed, and their stakes and interests align to the topic, then their responses may align better with interview questions. Informed consent information was provided at the beginning of the study to help ensure that teachers felt connected to the topic and were comfortable with the questions being asked. Additionally, the purpose of the interviews was noted. Research participants may have also subconsciously tried to correct or improve various instructional
strategies because they were being observed. It is important to note that observations occurred
during times when teachers felt both comfortable and uncomfortable, which could account for a
variety of behaviors.

It was also feasible that some teachers may have indicated a higher sense of false
confidence, which could be identified if teachers indicated a higher sense of confidence in their
skills than what may have been accurate. In like manner, teachers may have indicated a lower
level of confidence due to perceptions regarding their roles in instructing special education
students. Henderson, Ferguson-Smith, and Johnson (2005) referred to false confidence as related
to receiving effective feedback when learning a new skill. It is reasonable to assume that a lack
of effective feedback could impact the confidence of general education teachers. For example,
the absence of effective feedback may prompt teachers to assume that any difficulties may be
related to the student as opposed to teachers’ ability to provide meaningful instruction. Thus, it
was conceivable that a teacher in this study may have reported something with an inaccurate
amount of confidence; they may have reported a lower level of confidence if they perceived
minimal student progress, and this may have been partly due to the absence of effective
feedback.

Summary

This qualitative, phenomenological study examined the thoughts, opinions, and
experiences of general education teachers regarding special education students. This study was
limited to one school. Study participants were teachers in grades 1-5 who currently teach special
education students. Teacher reflections, interviews, and observations were used to gather data,
and each were analyzed using coding methods to identify themes that general education teachers
identified regarding confidence in their abilities and how their confidence and self-efficacy could
be improved. Member checks, peer debriefing, triangulation, and extensive description of the content of the data were utilized to ensure trustworthiness. Study limitations were noted because it was feasible that not all participants may have replied truthfully or provided honest opinions. Ethical concerns had to be addressed to maintain the confidentiality of the school and research participants.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In this chapter, I will be discussing the findings and results of this phenomenological study. This chapter details the procedures that were used to analyze the participant reflections, interviews, and observations, as well as how the phenomenological meaning of participants’ responses was determined. Additionally, this chapter scrutinizes the four themes/influences that were found in the from general education teachers regarding influences on their confidence when working with special education students.

In the previous chapter, the methodology of this study was detailed and the process of gathering data from the three different sources was explained. Reflections served as the first data source and were comprised of five rating scale questions and five open-ended questions. Interviews were also utilized to gather data. I conducted interviews in sessions that lasted approximately 30 minutes. These interviews allowed the general education teachers to communicate their experiences with special education students, as well as their thoughts and feelings on instructing students with disabilities. Observations were conducted during a 20-30 minute timeframe and allowed me to observe the behaviors that the general education teachers exhibited in their interactions with the special education students in their classrooms. This chapter provides analysis of the results of the different data. Additionally, themes and influences revealed by general education teachers were detailed regarding their confidence level when instructing special education students, as well as how their confidence impacted their instruction.

Analysis Procedures

Coding
After the reflections and interviews had been conducted, the responses and interview transcripts were analyzed using MAXQDA. Using this coding software, I was able to scrutinize the responses line-by-line and highlight specific words/phrases to code. These selected responses ranged from selections of 3-5 words to longer sentences. Some examples of codes used were: *figuring out what works best, a learning experience, parent communication, and collaboration with co-teacher*. Initially, the reflections were not color-coded; rather, the responses were simply being coded with new codes, or I was able to use existing codes for additional segments. After the reflections had been analyzed, the participant interviews were transcribed and analyzed in the same manner. As the interview analysis progressed, I noticed how codes could be grouped together to form groups that related to each other. For instance, codes such as *figuring out what works best, adjusting instruction, a learning experience*, and *learning about students* could be combined into a more broad *knowledge* group that signified gaining knowledge about special education students. Similarly, I could ascertain how other individual codes could be grouped together to form other overall groups. Figure 4.1 provides a visual example of the coding process from participants’ responses to resulting overall groupings.
Figure 4.1. Example of Coding Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selections from participants</th>
<th>Open Coding</th>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
<th>Selective Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Tricks how to modify it</td>
<td>Open to new methods; adjusted instruction; differentiation /accommodating</td>
<td>Modifying teaching strategies</td>
<td>Teachers gaining knowledge about their students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Something other than paper and pencil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Find a way that individualized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What would work for each child</td>
<td>Found a way to connect with student; figuring out what works best</td>
<td>Figuring students out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Okay this isn’t working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Figured out that one little thing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Great relationship</td>
<td>Learned strategies from co-teacher; observed teacher; communicating with co-teacher</td>
<td>Collaboration with co-teacher</td>
<td>Teachers communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helped me with instructing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• After a colleague showed me several ways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They want to come in and they’re interested</td>
<td>Parent interaction; parent communication; parent giving information</td>
<td>Learning from parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give him a purpose</td>
<td>Admin helped teacher; teacher felt supported</td>
<td>Admin support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Administration has helped me a lot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support team... including my Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I do not feel that I was adequately prepared</td>
<td>One special education class; did not feel prepared</td>
<td>Not prepared by teacher preparation courses</td>
<td>Teachers not feeling prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepared us more for how the brain works</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I have been to numerous reading/writing and math classes</td>
<td>Lack of training; training by subject; wants additional training</td>
<td>Professional training not focused on special education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wish I had more training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These overall groups eventually developed into themes regarding what impacted the confidence levels of general education teachers. As these overall groups were formed, I color-coded each group so different groups were easily identifiable and I could ascertain where
codes/areas began to overlap. For instance, a code referring to gaining knowledge about students could be linked with collaboration with co-teachers.

The observation data were written down via hand and were coded appropriately. The notes were reviewed using the same color-coding as the MAXQDA codes to assist with establishing a connection or a lack of connection to responses in the reflections and interviews. It was interesting to review the observation notes, as the observations did not reveal any unknown behaviors or situations that were contrary to any of the information provided in the other data sources, the observations mirrored what was described in the participant reflections and interviews. It should be noted that at the time of the observations, the participating general education teachers had instructed the special education students in their classes for nearly a full school year; and some participants had been working with special education students for multiple years. Thus, participants have already determined what their students need to help them learn, established routines/rituals, and were experienced in implementing that knowledge. The observations, therefore, can be seen more as a confirmation of the participants’ responses in their reflections and interviews, because there were no contradictions observed in responses from the reflections and interviews.

**Examination of Data**

This section identifies the varying themes and influences that were revealed during the analysis of the reflections, interviews, and observations following the coding process described in the previous section. The open-ended responses on the reflection were the first stage of data collection to be completed and provided the initial themes and concepts to be explored. These initial themes were: lack of specific special education knowledge, collaboration with special education co-teachers, experience/knowledge to improve confidence, and mindsets of the
teachers. These initial themes/influences dealt primarily with factors that have influenced and impacted the general education teachers’ confidence and comfort levels when working with special education students.

The first step in determining the themes and concepts began with the open-ended questions from the teacher reflections. The open-ended questions (See Appendix B) provided the general education teachers with a more free-form option of communicating their thoughts on what impacts their confidence, allowing teachers to individualize their thoughts and opinions in response to the reflection questions.

Based on analysis of the reflections, general education teachers recognize a lack of preparedness in their knowledge of special education instruction. This was identified as an initial theme based on repeated remarks on Question 2, which asked general education teachers to elaborate on what might help them become more confident. Further detailing a lack of preparedness on special education knowledge was found through responses on Question 4, in which five of the participants indicated they had not received specific training for working with special education students through their teaching location; only one participant indicated that he/she had received such training.

The participants stipulated that much of the training they received occurred while “on the job” and focused on differentiating instruction for struggling general education students. Subsequently, these teachers used that training to help with special education students, even though the training was not specific to that population of students. Responses detailed that 50% of these teachers have not received specific training for instructing special education students through college courses. Additionally, 50% of the participants stipulated that trainings attended through their job focused on other aspects related to their teaching positions, such as identifying
struggling students and differentiating instruction. Only Betsy indicated that he/she had participated in training specific for special education students.

Another notable theme from the reflections was that the participants found that working, observing, and being supported by their co-workers/administration helped boost their confidence. Responses in question 2 and question 4 of the open-ended responses communicated references to having a support system, observing co-workers modeling strategies for them, and positive relationships with co-teachers. These responses were significant in the coding analysis of the reflections responses combined with further responses from the interview analysis.

The phenomenological interview analysis further supported the initial themes to be found in the open-ended reflection questions. Interview analysis also provided depth and substance to the initial themes revealed in the reflection questions, which allowed the general initial themes to be expanded on into more specific themes and influences. Similarly, interviews helped confirm information from reflections. For instance, some teachers focused more on detailing their experiences in instructing special education students, how their expectations have changed, and learning more about their students to better understand them. Other general education teachers described their relationships with their special education teachers and/or finding a working balance with their co-teacher and how that has helped them with special education students. Thus, it can be assumed that general education teachers discussed individually-relevant topics, which provided numerous, unique perspectives to the study; as each participant had his/her own perspective about what helped him/her become more confident.

The interviews allowed teachers to talk about their experiences and perceptions. The resulting analysis of the reflections, combined with the interview analysis, revealed specific influences that general education teachers consider important when developing knowledge to
work with special education students, which subsequently allow the teachers to become more
certain and comfortable when working with these students.

After reviewing the analyzed data, the participants’ responses revealed areas that
impacted their confidence in working with special education students. These areas related to
influences that negatively impacted a teacher’s confidence due to not feeling prepared: “I do not
feel that I was adequately prepared to serve students with disabilities in college;” helping a
teacher become more confident through having a support system among their co-workers: “I
have a great support system through my team;” gaining confidence through experience and
knowledge: “I have pretty much had on the job training,” and teacher confidence leading to a
transformation of beliefs and assumptions: “They blew me out of the water, and now my
expectations for them are--have changed dramatically”

These participant responses provided insights into the participants’ thoughts and feelings
about how different areas have impacted their confidence. These overarching responses offer a
preview of the themes to be examined in this chapter, and those themes will be further examined
using responses from the participants to highlight how the different areas impacted the
confidence of the general education teachers.

**Current Level of Confidence**

Prior to addressing the themes derived from various data sources, I wanted to provide an
overview of the current levels of confidence and comfort levels of general education teachers
regarding different aspects of instructing special education students. This overview will serve to
provide a context for the participants’ responses on how their confidence has improved and what
has impacted their confidence. The rating scales in the reflection data source asked the general
education teachers to rate themselves on a scale of 1-5 (See Appendix B). The six participating
general education teachers’ responses are illustrated below in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2. Results of Reflection Rating Scale

![Figure 4.2 Results of Reflection Rating Scale](image)

Figure 4.2 illustrates the ratings of general education teachers (n=6) for each reflection rating scale question.

As Figure 4.2 illustrates, the majority of the general education teachers (n=6) believe they are moderately confident and prepared to work with their special education students. As demonstrated in Question 1, general education teachers are moderately confident to mostly confident regarding their instruction of special education students. Responses to Question 2 indicated that participants were somewhat to mostly confident in managing different behaviors; with only one participant feeling less than confident.

The third question sought to determine teachers’ level of preparation in instructing special education students. Four of the participants indicated that they had been somewhat prepared to instruct special education students; one teacher indicated that he/she was not prepared at all, and one teacher indicated that he/she was mostly prepared. Question 4 illustrated that all the general education teachers were somewhat to mostly confident at differentiating instruction based on the needs of their students. Responses to Question 5 indicated that general
education teachers all have close interaction with their special education students. A rating of 5 by two participants on this rating scale indicated one-on-one interaction, so ratings of 4 by three participants may indicate a small group set-up in these teachers’ classrooms. A rating of three by one participant may indicate a more whole group instructional set-up in his/her class. The six participants reported that they are somewhat confident or mostly confident in different aspects of instructing special education students; with one participant reporting being less confident only in managing behaviors.

These ratings serve to demonstrate the confidence of participating teachers in differing aspects of instructing special education students at the time of this study. Their confidence levels, at this later point in the school year, serve as a reflection of how the previously identified themes/influences have impacted the participants and their instruction of special education students.

**Influences on Teacher Confidence**

This section contains the results of the phenomenological analysis of the data sources, and primarily details the results of the phenomenological interview data. As discussed above, the participants completed a reflection and interview, and were observed in their interactions with special education students. In this section, I will discuss the findings of the phenomenological analysis and the resulting themes that emerged. The three data sources were analyzed as previously described, and revealed four themes that, per the participants, influenced the confidence of the general education teachers in their involvement with the special education students in their classrooms.

These themes include general education teachers not feeling prepared: “I do not feel that I was adequately prepared to serve students with disabilities in college.” This theme includes sub-
sections that reveal specific facets of this theme: “I was first asked to be the inclusion classroom and agreed without much knowledge of what it would look like” (Meghan), “I have not really had an opportunity to attend any professional development through my teaching position related, specifically to special education” (Elsie), and “I was very unsure of what to do and how to best help these students” (DJ). The second theme is having a support system among their co-workers, administration, and other stakeholders: “I have a great support system through my team,” as well as the accompanying subareas that provide more detailed facets about the levels of support: “A colleague showed me several ways in which to help these students” (Betsy), “How was his day going? Do you think he'll be ready for this today? Should we do this instead?” (Sporty), and “Talk to the parents. They know their kids better than anybody” (DJ).

The third theme is gaining needed knowledge through “on the job training” and “trial and error” with the general education teachers providing different avenues that detail their experiences: “finding things with different children that work” (Elsie), and “I already know things right offhand that I can do” (Elsie). The final theme of the study is teacher confidence leading to a transformation of beliefs and assumptions: “They blew me out of the water, and now my expectations for them have changed dramatically” with more specific areas being revealed by the general education teachers: “I think one of the first times I read one of his writing assignments, you could just see the lights come on” (Betsy), and “I'm so proud of them” (Sunny).

Each of the subareas for these four themes were revealed during the phenomenological analysis of the data sources, and provide a deeper understanding of the identified themes based on the participants’ responses.

“So coming in, I really didn't know what to expect”
I will be discussing how this theme developed, and the different facets that comprise this theme as revealed by the phenomenological analysis of the reflections, interviews, and observations. These facets included “I was first asked to be the inclusion classroom and agreed without much knowledge of what it would look like” (Meghan), which explores general education teacher not knowing what to expect, “I have not really had an opportunity to attend any professional development through my teaching position related, specifically to special education” (Elsie), which details general education teachers not having professional development opportunities for needed knowledge, and “I was very unsure of what to do and how to best help these students” (DJ), exploring general education teachers not knowing how to best instruct special education students as a result of the participant’s lack of preparedness. This theme is important to the study because general education teachers, who want to serve and instruct their special education students, are faced with a lack of preparedness that impacts their ability to instruct their students.

At the beginning of the analysis process, MAXQDA allowed me to utilize coding to identify short words or phrases and assign specific codes to those selected words. In the process of coding the reflections, an initial theme of lack of training in special education knowledge became evident. Many of the participants spoke about not having enough training in special education instruction or not having professional development that focused on improving their ability to work with special education students. Coding specific to this initial theme derived from codes such as not prepared, one college class, and did not prepare me.

While the participant reflections allowed the general education teachers to say specifically that they only had “one class in my education program for special education”, or that their college courses “did not prepare me at all” for teaching special education students;
interviews allowed general education teacher to describe being unprepared relative to their own experiences. The analysis of the participant interviews, and the subsequent coding, revealed that the initial theme of a lack of special education knowledge was only partially correct. Interviews began to elucidate a level of frustration from the general education teachers regarding their lack of being prepared to instruct special education students in the general classroom.

Being unprepared to instruct special education students, and not knowing what to expect, appears to be the first main theme to appear to impact the confidence of the general education teachers. Both the participant reflections and interviews helped form this theme about what impacted a general education teacher’s confidence, and there was no apparent discrepancy between the sources of data on this theme.

“I was first asked to be the inclusion classroom and agreed without much knowledge of what it would look like” (Meghan)

Meghan described being asked to teach an inclusion class and agreed without really knowing what to expect or what would really be required of the class. DJ specifically stated that when she first started working with special education students, she asked herself, “what do I do? I don't know how to do--what to do with these kids.” This quote exemplifies the level of unpreparedness that the general education teachers felt when first working with special education students, and the lack of preparation that general education teachers have received through their preparation programs. Elsie described having only “one class related to students with disabilities, really influenced how confident I felt when I first entered the classroom”.

Elsie described her preparation as having “one special education class in my preparation program. It did not prepare me at all. This class was more of laws and a legal aspect, vs. how to actually teach and handle behaviors.” Sporty described being taught how to “identify struggling
students, but there was nothing further than that.” The general education teachers in this study identified not having the level of knowledge needed to adequately instruct special education students in their inclusion classrooms, although they did possess the necessary technical and legal knowledge. As Meghan described: “I was fairly knowledgeable about the different disabilities, but I was less prepared as to how to teach them.”

The level of preparedness that general education teachers had was limited to general understanding of special education knowledge and, as Meghan described, “less about how to adjust my teaching style/lessons to fit their disability.” Sunny described not knowing/understanding a concept such as differentiation and how it worked into adapting materials for special education students. She described her initial understanding of differentiation as “this huge thing. You have to be really elaborate with it,” rather than recognizing it for what it was when adapting material for special education students, and that “the smallest things are differentiation, which I never really realized.” This specific comment demonstrates the lack of preparedness general education teacher may face when first working with special education students. A general education teacher that does not have a firm grasp of special education instruction knowledge may enter the classroom ill-prepared for the demands of working with special education students. Rather, the general education teachers might have an inflated thought about what is involved and become quickly overwhelmed at all that is needed and involved. “I still am not really sure, like, where I need to stand with them and how I need to help them” is how Sunny described herself at the time of this study about her relations with special education students.

“I have not really had an opportunity to attend any professional development through my teaching position related, specifically to special education” (Elsie)
Reflections indicated that participants recognize that they are not still fully prepared to instruct special education students. Participants continue to find themselves unprepared for instructing special education students or working with them in different aspects; such as behavior management, assessing special education students, or teaching strategies. Participants also described what could help them feel more confident in working with special education students. The general education participants described their lack of preparedness in different aspects; ranging from “finding different types of instructional methods to help my special education students would boost my confidence” to “more examples of what the inclusion classroom should look like as far as co-teaching” to help them become more prepared on the instruction front of working with special education students. When discussing addressing the behaviors of special education students, participants described wanting “training and understood the proper way to deal with some of the behaviors,” demonstrating a level of unpreparedness to address behaviors.

“I was very unsure of what to do and how to best help these students” (DJ)

Being unprepared to instruct special education students can impact both students and teachers in many ways. As previously detailed, teachers who felt unprepared did not know what they needed to do or how to effectively instruct their special education students. Indeed, Elsie described how feeling unprepared “really influenced how confident I felt when I first entered the classroom.” When teachers feel unprepared, and they struggle with knowing the best way to instruct a certain population of students, and in trying to figure out things as they go, it can have a detrimental impact of the confidence of the general education teacher. Regarding special education students, if the general education teachers serving these students are unaware of how to effectively help/instruct the students, then those students will not get the best education possible. The general education teachers may not know how to adapt or adjust the material to
the level that the students need based on their disabilities. As a lack of preparedness in
differentiation impacted Sunny in being able to understand how to easily adjust material for
his/her students, it possibly might impact other teachers who may be similarly unprepared in
different aspects of instructing special education students.

“I have a great support system through my team”

This section details how this theme developed and the different facets that comprise this
theme as revealed by the phenomenological analysis of the reflections, interviews, and
observations. These facets included “a colleague showed me several ways in which to help these
students” (Betsy), “how was his day going? Do you think he'll be ready for this today? Should
we do this instead?” (Sporty), and “talk to the parents. They know their kids better than
anybody” (DJ). The participants revealed each of these subareas through the phenomenological
analysis of their responses, indicating that each of these areas are important facets of having a
support system. This theme is important for this study because the participants serve special
education students in their classrooms, and, as revealed, to best serve their students the
participants need this support system.

During the coding portion of the analysis, certain phrases such as great support system,
great relationship, administration helped helped develop this theme. The phrases and the
corresponding quotes related to the questions from the participant reflections that asked what
helped influenced their confidence when working with special education students. These
identified codes showed that the participants were communicating with others in their school.
Participant reflection responses provided minimal detail about the communication with others in
their work environment. Rather, analysis of interview transcripts revealed how the general
education teachers communicated with others regarding instructing special education students
and acquiring knowledge about these students. This allowed general education teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge to instruct their special education students and better serve the students based on the students’ needs.

During the analysis of the initial interviews, it strongly appeared that the main focus of communication was collaborating with special education teachers. However, in later interviews, the interview transcripts revealed more information about the communication of general education teachers. During observations, it was noted that the general education teachers communicated with their special education teachers about activities for the day, and it was also stated by Elsie that, “we have very similar personalities, and we can get along. We can plan together.....We respect other’s opinion, and I think that’s very important with co-teaching.” Thus, analysis of interviews and reflections revealed that teachers gain confidence from the communication and support they receive from other stakeholders involved with the special education students. As Sunny stated, “I have a great support system through my team;” indicating that, as she described, Sunny views those she work with, and those with a vested interest in their special education students, as members of a team to work with, learn from, and get support from if needed.

“A colleague showed me several ways in which to help these students” (Betsy)

In her reflection, Betsy stated that her confidence in working with special education students improved when a colleague demonstrated various strategies for working with special education students. Betsy was initially unprepared to meet the needs of special education students, but collaboration and support from a co-worker helped her develop the necessary knowledge. Betsy described communicating with and getting the support from her co-worker to make up for her unpreparedness. Sunny detailed working with her special education teachers
and stated that “I’d ask her probably 1,000 questions a day” regarding her special education students.

DJ also stated that, “I observed some of my co-teachers’ strategies and I have developed some of my own.” This indicates that, rather than struggling on her own to come up with something, she used the support available from her special education teacher to learn what she needed to know to work more effectively with her special education students. Participants expressed that struggling general education teachers should collaborate with co-workers who are experienced in working with special education students because these co-workers can be valuable sources of advice and support. In addition to their co-workers, the school administration serves as a source of support as well.

Elsie described her administration as having “helped me a lot in dealing with different situations” revealing that, in addition to direct co-workers, she considers her administration as another source of support. Elsie noted that administration provides an avenue of support that other members of a teacher’s team may be unable to provide. Elsie further described that “as a school we work closely in better ways to prepare” which “brought my level of confidence higher.” Elsie was the only participant to reference the administration. However, there were no reports to the contrary.

“How was his day going? Do you think he'll be ready for this today? Should we do this instead?” (Sporty)

Sporty expressed that communicating and getting support from his co-workers goes beyond acquiring technical knowledge. Working together in the classroom for the betterment of students is also essential. In Sporty’s case, he described communicating with a special education teacher to determine if a particular special education student was ready for a classroom activity.
Elsie described working with her co-teacher as a challenge in the beginning, but “once you are on the same team and the students know, like, they're [the two teachers] going to say the same thing. They're going to back each other up. That makes a huge difference.” This quote indicates that when co-teachers are communicating and supporting each other in the classroom, it can effect positive improvement on both the students and the general education teacher. By communicating/supporting each other and working as a team, the general education teachers and special education teachers build a relationship that fosters the type of communication/support that helps general education teachers. Sunny described “loving working with her” inclusion teacher, and described having a level of support and communication with her inclusion teacher that “if I ever had a question, like, "Do you think this is going to work? Do you think this is not going to work?" I know I can go to” her. This level of support, developed through having a positive relationship with her inclusion teacher, enabled Sunny to become more confident in working with special education students; it also allowed Sunny and her inclusion teacher to problem-solve together to meet the needs of their special education students.

“Talk to the parents. They know their kids better than anybody” (DJ)

It was also determined that communicating with stakeholders at home is also essential. DJ revealed that one of her best sources of support is from the parents of the special education students. DJ stated that some parents “are very involved, ask the right questions, come to the meetings,” providing a consistent source of communication and support in working with the special education student. She described getting valuable information from parents, describing parents who communicate with the general education teacher and offer support and information, telling the teacher “this is what works for my kid.” Sunny also detailed her own communication with parents, indicated that she felt more confident when parents come in and “they're interested
in what their kids are doing at school and they want to know, like, what--how can I help on homework?’ This support at home for the special education students also builds a positive relationship with parents by communicating with parents about their student’s progress. Sunny described receiving notes from parents about matters their students are struggling with at home; issues that the teachers may not be aware of in school. By communicating with parents, and having them be a source of support on the general education teacher’s “team,” the general education teacher may be better able to accurately meet the needs to the students.

General education teachers that do not communicate with co-workers or other stakeholders may run the risk of not getting the support and needed knowledge to better instruct special education students. Without communicating with stakeholders, general education teachers may be forced to solve problems without the benefit of collaboration. Were this to happen, general education teachers may find themselves overwhelmed with figuring out what is needed. By communicating with experienced co-workers and parents, and having a support team in place that will assist and guide the general education teacher, the participants have noted the necessity of collaboration and support. This provides these teachers with options and different avenues to explore to develop the necessary knowledge and individuals who will support the teacher when they do not understand or are unprepared.

“On the job training” and “trial and error”

Phenomenological analysis of the reflections, interviews, and observations detail how this theme developed. This quote reveals that participants consider acquiring the necessary knowledge is primarily dependent on working with special education students. Other facets that further explore this theme include “finding things with different children that work” (Elsie), as well as “I already know things right offhand that I can do” (Elsie). Each of these aspects are
ways in which general education teachers have revealed that they gain confidence and needed knowledge in instructing special education students. This theme is essential to the purpose of this study. If general education teachers are going to be serving special education students in their classrooms, then these teachers must address their lack of preparedness and acquire the knowledge necessary to meet the students at their levels.

Although mentioned occasionally in the participant reflections, this section was revealed primarily through the interviews with the participating general education teachers. DJ noted that teacher training for special education students came primarily through working with and instructing special education students, while Elsie further described learning to teach special education students as primarily “trial and error.” This theme was coded using terms such as trial and error, knowing students, a learning experience, and figuring out what works best. It was apparent that every participating general education teacher had described learning about their special education students, what they as teachers could do to meet their academic needs, and how it has helped them learn what to expect when working with special education students.

Observations of participating teachers indicated that the general education teachers had routines and plans in place to address the academic needs of their special education students. There was familiarity to the general education teachers’ interactions and the ways in which they worked with special education students that demonstrated the general education teachers had learned what was necessary to effectively instruct special education students. Data analysis also revealed that general education teachers gain confidence by working closely with special education students. By finding what works for the students, applying strategies learned from communicating with their support team, and being open to learning as they instruct special education students; general education teachers are able to develop knowledge and enhance their
confidence. As Elsie described of her first couple of years working with special education students, “as my experience grew, my confidence has also grown.”

“Finding things with different children that work” (Elsie)

Participants noted the importance of learning on the job as they instruct special education students. Participants also suggested that identifying successful strategies can positively impact the learning experience for these students. Betsy described identifying creative strategies that allowed special education students to express their knowledge beyond just the “paper and pencil test.” She described learning to give special education students alternatives to classroom assignments, stating that if “they can draw something, if they can make text features, if they can make slides, they're very, very much more capable, and they can show some of their capabilities.” Similarly, Sporty described learning that he needed to make the learning material relevant to their special education students, working in “anything that I can try to be relatable with them just so they kind of have a couple laughs and then start doing the work.” Similarly, he noted the benefits of allowing special education students to present their work in a variety of meaningful ways, “I just try to have some of the special ed--essentially just draw a picture. Show their answer. Because for them, I think it, especially it helps them just make sense of all of it.” This allowed special education students to become more involved in their classroom activities and helped Sporty become more confident in instructing special education students.

Meghan described using a student’s interest to improve academic achievement. Meaghan detailed an incident in which she utilized prior knowledge of a student to tailor instruction that best met the learning needs of the student. Meghan described asking students to “write me a story, an opinion about literally anything, and then they'll write for two pages.” This allowed Meghan to learn through trial and error to promote engagement in the classroom. Elsie suggested
that learning what works best for students can be problematic, “it's difficult because you really have to wrack your brain trying to figure out what would work with each child -- you have to pinpoint what the issue is.” Elsie also stated “when I figured out that one little thing like that would change his whole day -- After I came to that realization, it made life so much easier. I feel like after we got through those bumps, then that's when we could really start learning.” Indicating that once she figured that one thing out, that it enabled Elsie to be able to better instruct and work with the special education student.

Sunny said that she was better able to create a plan once she learned more about her students. Sunny described, “I'm better at being like, ‘Okay. This group of my kids can do this and this group can do this,’” in reference to learning what her students needed, and was able to work with her special education teacher to develop a plan for the classroom.

“I already know things right offhand that I can do” (Elsie)

Learning on the job and learning what is effective for special education students provided general education teachers with a foundation of knowledge that could be utilized in the future. Elsie said, “I wasn't as familiar working with inclusion yet” in reference to her first year, but she then stated that she has “strategies that I can use, not having to go research and trying to find ways. I've already, you know, had a full year of experience with that.” Elsie stipulated that previous experience working with special education students and learning through trial and error helped improve her confidence in working with new special education students. Additionally, Sporty described previous experience and “fieldwork in Reading Recovery. So, that helped me feel more prepared.” Per Elsie and Sporty’s responses, having prior experience and relevant knowledge for working with special education students, enabled them to feel more prepared for the challenges of working with special education students.
General education teachers may feel unprepared to work with special education students if they have not acquired knowledge from their support team and if they do not have previous experience working with special education students. Previous experience and knowledge acquired through trial and error may allow general education teachers to be more effective when working with special education students. This may foster confidence in general education teachers.

“They blew me out of the water, and now my expectations for them have changed dramatically”

This theme was revealed by the phenomenological analysis of participants’ responses, and examines the changes in the perceptions and expectations of general education teachers. The subareas for this theme include “I think one of the first times I read one of his writing assignments, you could just see the lights come on” (Betsy), and “I'm so proud of them” (Sunny). Each subarea reveals how the participants’ perceptions and expectations have changed. This theme is essential to the study because participants are better able to meet the academic needs of special education students if they have a positive perception of special education students and higher learning expectations for these students.

Betsy described seeing special education students as “first kids and students in general, then it is not so overwhelming.” This prompted the development of the theme that general education teachers should have a certain mindset toward special education students that helps these teachers become more confident and better able to instruct special education students. DJ stated that she was “very nervous about working with SWD in my first few years” and further described how being nervous impacted how much effort she put into to working closely with special education students. Sporty described feeling more confident because he wanted to
“accommodate them based on their needs,” and that influenced how she viewed special education student in their class.

Analysis of interviews, comments, and references from general education teachers revealed how their perceptions of special education students have change and how that has subsequently changed teacher participants. DJ said “they’re so low.... you put all these limitations on them” when first working with special education students, but also stated that was “totally not my viewpoint. Totally not my viewpoint anymore. I love it. I enjoy it.” This change in perception is elucidates the final theme of this study; general education teachers might gain confidence due to a change in their perceptions and assumptions regarding special education students. Thus, special education teachers might view special education students as those they advocate for, as opposed to a challenging population of students they are required to teach in their inclusion classrooms.

“I think one of the first times I read one of his writing assignments, you could just see the lights come on” (Betsy)

Realizing special education students may want to learn can alter the assumptions and expectations of these students, which may help general education teachers gain confidence. When describing special education students, Sporty said, “some of them will be frustrated.” Meghan also stated, “I think they just get very frustrated” when special education students struggle in the classroom. Meghan further described her interactions with special education students, noting times in class where “they're trying and they're learning and they're looking at us for help. Like, ‘Help me because I want to know this word, but I don't know it.’ Like, give me the strategies” because “they do want to read. They do want to write. They do want to spell things correctly.” Betsey described a time in class when she read an assignment of one special
education student to the entire classroom and “you could just see the lights come on” for the special education student. These descriptions indicate how perceptions of general education teachers have changed. These teachers now view special education students as students who want to be helped, can be taught, and are deserving of advocacy. Betsy explained that she changed her expectations to be more realistic given the capabilities of special education students, describing classroom assignments where “their paragraphs don't have to be lengthy paragraphs. They don't have to spell every word correctly” but that the students were required to follow the same directions as all other students in the class. This indicated that the expectations of general education teachers may have changed, but not the perception that special education students were capable of learning. Identifying effective methods may be attributable to the support general education teachers received from peers and administrators, as well as the foundation of knowledge they developed working with special education students and determining what helped those students learn. Participants indicated that acquiring the necessary knowledge and support can promote change the perceptions of general education teachers regarding special education students.

DJ suggested that her perceptions of special education students changed over years. She said, “you can teach them just like everybody else. You just have to find a way that's individualized for them.” Previously, she described placing mental limitations on the capabilities of special education students; she subsequently stated she has high expectations for special education students, expressing “I just--it's not all of a sudden you can just mark them off.” DJ stated that having high expectations was a direct result of her increased confidence in the capabilities of special education students and their [the teacher] confidence in helping those students reach those expectations.
“I'm so proud of them” (Sunny)

Sunny described a positive emotion when noting the progress of special education students in her class, something that she brags to parents about in conferences. Per Sunny’s expression, this may indicate that when the general education teachers see their special education students succeed through their efforts, instead of struggling, that it changes how they feel about the students. DJ described how sometimes special education students “get pushed on the backburner and they're just as valuable as every other kid.” These quotes reveal the changes in perceptions about special education students from a group to put limitations on to students that are just as much a part of the classroom as every other student and just as deserving to be taught. Betsy noted the yearly progress of special education students and said “it's kind of rewarding to see somebody who was struggling in a particular area and who was encouraged and now, you know, they think it's wonderful.” Per the participants’ responses, seeing special education students succeed creates a positive perception about the general education teacher’s abilities to instruct special education students, and that those students are capable of learning in their own ways.

Current perceptions and expectations regarding special education students is dissimilar from feeling unprepared to work with special education students and, as Sunny described, “not knowing what to expect” and, as DJ stated, “what do I do? I don't know how to do--what to do with these kids.” Meghan discussed feeling more confident working with special education students because “most of my special education students, like, they want to learn, which is awesome.” The change in perceptions/assumptions regarding the capabilities of special education students is a critical aspect of improving the confidence of general education teachers in working with this population of students.
Initially, general education teachers may view special education students as difficult to teach. However, changing these perceptions is critical. When general education teachers begin to advocate for special education students, this may be a reflection of the increased confidence among general education teachers regarding their ability to instruct special education students. Viewing special education students in the same manner as regular education students may prompt general education teachers to seek support to become better prepared and identify effective teaching methods. Subsequently, this may help general education teachers become more confident when instructing special education students.

As detailed in this section, the phenomenological analysis of the participants’ responses revealed four themes that influenced general education teacher confidence in instructing and working with special education students. The participants revealed how each theme can influence their confidence, as by extension, their interactions and ability to instruct special education students. From not feeling prepared with the needed knowledge to effectively instruct special education students, to developing a support system and gaining knowledge as they [the teachers] work with the students, the participants described the impact of each theme and how each area influenced their confidence.

**Conclusion**

These four themes previously discussed in this chapter included general education teachers not feelings prepared: “I do not feel that I was adequately prepared to serve students with disabilities in college;” helping general education teachers become more confident through having a support system among their co-workers: “I have a great support system through my team;” gaining confidence through experience and knowledge: “I have pretty much had on the job training,” and an increase in teacher confidence leading to a transformation of beliefs and
assumptions: “They blew me out of the water, and now my expectations for them have changed dramatically.” Each of these themes revealed that the general education participants needed assistance to be able to effectively instruct their special education students and meet the needs of these students.

As detailed in Chapter 2, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs emphasizes that certain needs must be met in order for an individual to progress to the next stage of the hierarchy. In like manner, general education teachers who lack the preparation to instruct special education students need to address that lack of preparation. As revealed in this study, a lack of preparation can be mitigated by the collaboration/support of co-workers and development of a “support team.” As revealed by the participants, this support team can provide the general education teachers with needed knowledge about their special education students and can also provide the teachers with strategies and knowledge. This “support team” fulfills the need for knowledge for general education teachers, allowing them to improve and develop their own teaching strategies with support. Additionally, general education teachers are often required to learn “on the job” or through “trial and error,” as participants described. Participants detailed how learning “on the job” provided them with needed knowledge about their special education students. Through that experience, general education teachers developed a foundation of knowledge to utilize for both existing and future students. Thus, the teachers’ lack of preparation is addressed and the need for knowledge is fulfilled. Based on the responses of the participants and the revealed themes, it can be assumed that participants’ needs are being met because these participants indicated they gained both knowledge and experience through the revealed themes. The acquisition of this knowledge and experience helped these teachers develop confidence when working with and
instructing special education students. Thus, strategies to assist teachers who are working with special education students for the first time must be further scrutinized.
CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I will be discussing the results of the study as it relates to the overall purpose of the study. This includes identifying ways to assist general education teachers in improving their confidence when instructing special education students, comparing the study results to Maslow’s Hierarchy and the existing literature found in Chapter 2, and presenting recommendations to improve the confidence of general education teachers who are inexperienced in instructing special education students. Finally, this chapter will present ideas/recommendations for future research studies relating to topics identified, but not explored in this study.

In Chapter 4, the phenomenological analysis of the participant responses revealed four themes. These areas related to influences that negatively impacted a teacher’s confidence due to not feeling prepared: “I do not feel that I was adequately prepared to serve students with disabilities in college;” helping a teacher become more confident through having a support system among their co-workers: “I have a great support system through my team;” gaining confidence through experience and knowledge: “I have pretty much had on the job training,” and teacher confidence leading to a transformation of beliefs and assumptions: “They blew me out of the water, and now my expectations for them have changed dramatically.”

Each of these themes is presented as influences on the confidence of general education teachers when instructing special education students. The themes that emerged from the study demonstrated a progression from general education teachers being unprepared to instruct special education students to experiencing a change in perceptions and assumptions about these students and their ability to be taught. Initially, participants described being unprepared for instructing special education students. However, with the support they received from their “support team” of
stakeholders (other teachers, parents, school administration), and with the knowledge and experience they gained through instructing special education students participants appeared to realize that they acquired the necessary knowledge and skills over a period of time. Thus, these teachers developed an increased confidence that they could instruct special education students and that these students were capable of learning and being taught.

When the general education teachers were confident in their ability to instruct special education students, this likely improved their self-esteem. Subsequently, this prompted teachers to further develop their skills working with special education students. As detailed in Chapter 2, general education teachers with a greater degree of self-confidence had higher self-efficacy. A high self-efficacy helps individuals feel that they are up to the task of succeeding in the face of a challenge instead of quitting or giving up (Bandura, 1994), thus having higher self-efficacy influences general education teachers’ perceptions on their ability to instruct special education students and the degree that teachers strive to help special education students succeed.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs emphasizes addressing specific needs to help individuals maximize their potential (Burton, 2012; Heylighen, 1992). This hierarchy helps in identifying an individual’s specific needs to increase that individual’s level of motivation; thereby increasing that individual’s self-efficacy or his/her belief in his/her own abilities. The themes identified in this study appear to address those specific needs that help enable general education teachers to effectively instruct special education students. The themes revealed that general education teachers feel unprepared when first instructing special education students, but teachers develop confidence when they gain knowledge/skills specific to instructing special education students and when they have a support system to assist them. Without their knowledge/skill and support needs being met, the general education teachers may struggle to best determine how to teach
special education students. Also, without their needs being met, general education teachers may not be motivated to effectively instruct their students. Therefore, having their knowledge needs met allows general education teachers to progress in their development of knowledge and skills. This progression might eventually help general education continue to develop their skills so their students can succeed.

In the discussion of results, found below, I will present the results of the study and how they compare with Maslow’s Hierarchy and the existing literature reviewed in Chapter 2; as well as how the study results connect with the purpose of this study in helping general education teachers develop confidence in instructing special education students. In the recommendations section, I will present recommendations for school districts, school administration, and general education teachers that might help fulfill specific needs of general education teachers.

**Discussion of Results**

In this section, I will be discussing the results of this study and how those results relate to the review of literature and the theoretical framework of Maslow’s Hierarchy. Some aspects of instructing special education students are essential for general education teachers. This section details the instructional skill required in an inclusion classroom. First, it is essential to possess the knowledge and ability to differentiate classroom material and accommodate special education students based on their individual needs. It is also necessary to develop positive supports with the other stakeholders involved with special education students (special education co-teachers, parents, and administration). Additionally, general education teachers must be willing to be malleable regarding their beliefs and perceptions of special education students. These areas are important to effectively instructing special education students in an inclusion classroom; as they have a direct connection with influencing the general education teacher’s
ability to instruct special education students and be able to meet those students’ needs. Figure 5.1, seen below, presents how the stages of Maslow’s Hierarchy, the adapted hierarchies discussed in the literature review, and my study results connect with each other. As discussed in the literature review, while Maslow’s physiological stage focuses on what an individual’s body needs to survive, the adapted hierarchies argue that this stage accounts for the most “basic needs” of teachers in order to survive in their teaching position or complete their job. For my study, I followed the adapted hierarchies model of viewing Maslow’s stages.

**Figure 5.1 Connections between Hierarchies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maslow’s Hierarchy</th>
<th>Adapted Hierarchies for Teachers</th>
<th>My Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physiological</strong> - food, water, rest, etc.</td>
<td><strong>&quot;Physiological&quot;</strong> - Knowledge Needs</td>
<td><strong>&quot;Physiological&quot;</strong> - Accommodating/differentiating, specific skills, knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belonging</strong> - Relationships, friends</td>
<td><strong>Belonging</strong> - Frequent communication between teachers, support system</td>
<td><strong>Belonging</strong> - &quot;Great support system,&quot; learning from co-workers, admin support, collaboration with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Esteem</strong> - Feeling of Accomplishment</td>
<td><strong>Esteem</strong> - Recognition of teacher strengths, build on skills</td>
<td><strong>Esteem</strong> - Changing perceptions/expectations, seeing student improvements, positive attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Actualization</strong> - need for continuous improvement in order to realize his/her potential</td>
<td><strong>Self-Actualization</strong> - Conducting research, presenting ideas, problem-solving, strategic plan, use creativity, unique strengths and talents</td>
<td><strong>Self-Actualization</strong> - Advocating for special education student learning, transformation of beliefs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1 shows connections between Maslow’s Hierarchy, the adapted hierarchies of Cannon (2013) and Fisher and Royster (2017), and the results of my study.

This diagram demonstrates how the stages of Maslow’s Hierarchy connect with the adapted hierarchies of Cannon (2013) and Fisher and Royster (2016), and therefore my own study.

**Accommodating/differentiation for student needs.** This component of the study will be related to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the results of the data. The ability to accommodate to meet the needs of special education students and being able to differentiate
classroom material for the benefit of these students is an important component when instructing these students. The inability to do so negatively impacts the ability of general education teachers to offer effective instruction. Sunny described being unable to recognize how to differentiate effectively when she first began teaching special education students. DJ further detailed having to find instructing methods that were individualized for the students. Both participants described having to fulfill that knowledge/skill need before they were able to effectively instruct the special education students in their classroom. If general education teachers feel unprepared to work with special education students, per the first theme in Chapter 4, they are likely unable to differentiate or accommodate for special education students.

Maslow’s Hierarchy deals with addressing specific needs to reach an individual’s potential (Burton, 2012; Heylighen, 1992). While this study is focused on assisting general education teachers in becoming more confident in instructing special education students, Maslow’s hierarchy is used as a guide to recognize that general education teachers have certain needs that must be fulfilled before they can effectively instruct special education students. Being able to differentiate classroom material and accommodate students based on their individualized needs are needs that must be addressed for general education teachers. Addressing the knowledge needs of general education teachers connects with Maslow’s 1st stage, Physiological.

The Physiological stage of Maslow’s Hierarchy correlates with what the body needs to motivate an individual to the next stage. In their adapted hierarchy of needs for teachers, Fisher and Royster identified teacher knowledge and “basic needs” as belonging to this 1st stage (2016). Therefore, it can be argued that meeting the needs for teacher knowledge, or the “body” as per Maslow’s Hierarchy, allow teachers to continually improve and develop confidence. Analysis of the participants’ responses indicated a lack of preparedness in special education knowledge as a
primary theme and influence in impacting general education teacher confidence. As detailed in Chapter 4, participants described how their college courses did not prepare them, that they did not know what to expect as beginning teachers, and that their job trainings focused on subject-specific content. Therefore it can be inferred that before beginning to instruct special education students, the knowledge needs of these general education teachers were not being met. Instead, results indicated that general education teachers are not beginning their careers with a strong instructional foundation of knowledge of special education students and may only receive training through their teaching positions. According to a study by Stevens, Everington, and Kozar-Kocsis (2002), nearly 79% percent of general education teachers indicated that they had received training in accommodating and adapting classroom material through in-service programs. However, this study revealed that only one of six participants (Betsy) had received any in-service training in special education as part of their jobs.

Conversely, participants described being able to learn from colleagues, and being able to learn needed knowledge “on the job,” as Meghan described. Thus, the participants showed their knowledge needs could be met as a result of the general education teachers attempting to develop the knowledge and skills needed. This indicates that general education teachers are not having their knowledge needs met before working with special education students; rather those needs are being addressed only after the general education teachers begin working with special education students.

Being able to differentiate and accommodate for student needs are among the most important skills when instructing special education students. The literature review identified that general education teachers should adapt their classroom materials and instruct style in a variety of ways (King-Sears & Bowman-Kruhm, 2011; Stevens, Everington, and Kozar-Kocsis, 2002).
In the study, both Betsy and Sporty described finding alternate ways to help special education students demonstrate their knowledge. However, general education teachers struggled with this aspect of instructing special education students, as their need for knowledge was not being addressed before instructing their students. In my study, only Betsy (one of six participants) stated that she had received professional development training for instructing special education students; demonstrating a difference in my study compared to other studies. Other participants described taking only one or two general courses in special education during their preparation programs; which coincides with my literature review. Sobel, Iceman-Sands, & Basile (2007) described preparation courses as being focused on the overall knowledge of special education, rather than any specific knowledge. This is similar to how Elsie described her special education courses, stating her class was “more of laws and a legal aspect, vs. how to actually teach and handle behaviors.” In this aspect, both the results of my study and the literature review are similar.

My study results indicate that participants are getting their knowledge needs for special education students met, but only because these teachers are proactive in finding ways to meet these needs. Participants in this study did not have their knowledge needs met prior to working with special education students. Seeking out knowledge to differentiate and accommodate for their students is indicative of a level of motivation to resolve their unpreparedness in those skills; however, this may not be consistent among all general education teachers. This level of motivation suggests that participants might have been getting knowledge and support needs met in other ways (such as for general education students), and the teachers may have transferred that motivation to their special education students. This belief that the general education teachers are able to adapt the knowledge they currently have and believe that they can adapt to working with
special education students is known as *adaptive expertise*. Other general educations teachers may struggle to work with special education students due to not having their knowledge needs met, but may not have the motivation to seek out the knowledge. This lack of motivation could be attributed to the school environment. Study participants noted that support was available for colleagues. This increased knowledge can improve the confidence levels of general education teachers; which can then allow for the teachers to better serve the needs of their students.

**Developing positive relationships with stakeholders.** This section scrutinizes how developing positive supports with stakeholders correlates to results of this study, and how this area connects with Maslow’s Hierarchy and the literature review. Developing positive supports with stakeholders was detailed in Chapter 4. As detailed in Chapter 4, general education teachers indicated that they believed positive supports help teachers develop needed skills and knowledge for working with special education students. Without this support, it is reasonable to assume that general education teachers may feel alone when attempting to determine best practices of instructing special education students. Subsequently, this may negatively impact their confidence in working with these students.

In Maslow’s Hierarchy, there is a stage that relates to love and belonging in which individuals are motivated to seek out others for contact and support (Heylighen, 1992). In their adapted hierarchies for teachers, both Cannon (2013) and Fisher and Royster (2016) identified that the belonging stage relates to the presence of frequent communication between teachers and support system for teachers. The 2nd theme in Chapter 4 described the participants having a “great support system through my team.” Participants detailed feeling supported by others, and stated they could rely upon their support team to help fill in their knowledge gaps. This study
addresses whether these needs are being met relative to Maslow’s hierarchy and whether the teachers’ need for support and connection is being met.

Participant responses about learning from co-workers, utilizing feedback from parents, and receiving administrative support indicate that these needs are being met. Sunny described asking her inclusion co-teacher “a 1,000 questions a day,” while Elsie commented that the schoolteachers “work closely in better ways to prepare.” No participants described being unable or unwilling to communicate with others in the school; rather, there appear to be established routines that motivate general education teachers to be open to communicating with others. Elsie described the administration as being a source of assistance in different aspects of working with special education students, indicating that the administration may be the source of encouraging teachers to communicate with other teachers for support. Thus, participants may be being encouraged to communicate with others in the school, instead of relying on themselves only to make instructional decisions. Results from this study indicated that the needs of general education teachers for communication and support from co-workers are being met.

A review of literature detailed that collaboration was an essential skill for general education teachers when instructing inclusion classes. Rutherford (2007) noted, however, that collaboration was problematic for general education to effectively accomplish due to a low interaction between general and special education teachers; potentially leading to a relationship that was not supportive and could possibly impact the instruction of special education students. Regarding my study, there was little indication that these two groups of teachers do not interact to a degree needed for successful co-teaching. Participant responses indicated that, general and special education teachers appear to communicate and share information. This suggests there is a collaborative climate at the school that fosters communication between general education
teachers and special education teachers. As indicated by Elsie’s comments, the administration
evaluates the communication. Pellegrino, Weiss, and Regan (2015) stipulated that a struggle to
collaborate might be due to a lack of skill in collaborating. Some teachers may be unprepared to
collaborate with other teachers. However, this lack of collaborative skill is not evident in this study.

A review of literature referred to the school administration as the driving force behind the
integration of special education students in the general education classrooms (Samuels, 2017);
and that the administration has the power to influence a teacher’s feelings toward a situation by
their support or lack thereof (Riehl, 2009). As evidenced by Elsie’s description of the support
that her administration has provided her, it can be inferred that the administration in the research
school supports and assists struggling teachers. The collaborative environment created by this
administration prompts discussion between general education teachers and special education
teachers. This increased collaboration between teachers echoes Riehl’s study of administration
being a determining factor in the environment of the school (2009). Developing positive
relationships with other stakeholders is an integral part of instructing special education students.
The development of those relationships, and the support that development fosters, might prompt
an increase in general education teachers’ knowledge of special education students and may
positively impact the confidence of the general education teachers. Thus, when the teachers’
support needs are met, this may provide the general education teachers with a necessary support
and assistance when developing their knowledge and skills.

Open to changes in perception/expectations. It is essential for general education
teachers to be malleable if their perceptions and assumptions regarding special education
students are to change. The ability to alter and change one’s perception/expectations of an
individual is an important aspect of instructing special education students because a fixed perception of a special education student’s abilities might limit a teacher’s ability to instruct that student. Cassady (2011) argued that teachers’ attitude toward special education students could impact instruction. Thus, general education teachers may not effectively instruct special education students due to perceptions they have of these students. DJ reported that changing her perceptions of students prompted her to increase her expectations of the special education students in her class. This change might is likely to only occur when the knowledge and skill needs of the general education teachers are met. Thus, these teachers would have the necessary knowledge and skills to alter their perceptions of special education students and their ability to instruct those students.

Previously, I related study findings to the physiological and belonging stages of Maslow’s Hierarchy through developing skills for instructing students and developing positive supports. This area correlates with the Esteem stage of Maslow’s Hierarchy, which is predicated upon gratification and acknowledgement. In Cannon’s adapted Hierarchy, the Esteem stage was described as the recognition of a teacher’s strengths and accomplishments; as well as the stage where teachers build on their skills and competence through positive feedback (2013). DJ described observing her special education students succeed and learning in class. Meghan described getting students to learn by determining how to connect her student’s interest to the classroom material. Both participants, as a result of observing their students learning in class due to teacher effort, may have felt a sense of positive self-recognition and may have observed progress from special education students. DJ described student growth in her class as getting to “the same end point, just a different way of getting there.” Discerning student improvement could fulfill the esteem stage in Maslow’s Hierarchy; which links with feelings of
accomplishment and the recognition of teacher strengths/skills described in the adapted hierarchies. Such change could prompt an important change in teachers’ perceptions and expectations. Adhering to the perception that special education students are difficult to teach may prohibit the need for esteem from being fulfilled. If special education students make only limited progress, then teachers may not feel accomplished. Subsequently, teachers may lack the necessary confidence to develop their skills in instructing special education students. Participants in this study did not indicate that general education teachers believed their special education students could not learn. Meghan said, “it just like takes time and perseverance and, like, having to learn each student.” Although general education teachers indicated that special education students were sometimes difficult to teach, these teachers also implied that these students were capable of learning. Betsy said, “it's kind of rewarding to see somebody who was struggling in a particular area and who was encouraged and now, you know, they think it's wonderful.” The feeling of reward may help build a positive attitude and ensure that teachers do not view special education students in a negative manner.

The attitude of the general education teachers has a profound impact on how those teachers view special education students (Sharma and Sokal, 2016). Additionally, Rakap, Cig, & Parlak-Rakap, (2017) noted that teachers’ attitudes may be shaped as a result of their preparation courses. Theoretical courses tended to result in general education teachers with a less positive attitude toward special education students. Although participants in my study stated their courses did not prepare them for special education students, these participants generally held positive attitudes regarding special education students and appeared focused on offering effecting instruction. There did not appear to be any instance in which the participants felt that special education students were only the responsibility of the special education teacher. Rather,
participants described working with their co-teachers and sharing the responsibility of instructing all the students in the classroom, both general and special education students. This perception of a shared responsibility in the classroom is known as collective responsibility. Study participants had been teaching special education students for a minimum of one year, so their attitudes were developed over time. Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmon (2009) suggested that a teacher’s attitude impacts his/her instructional abilities. Teachers more focused on student learning are more effective at instructing their students. It is feasible that general education teachers in this study can maintain their motivation to instruct special education students because their needs for knowledge/skills and support are being met. Thus, participants may be more willing to change their perceptions and expectations of special education students and their capabilities as a result of observing their students making improvement in the classroom.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate and determine ways that general education teachers develop confidence in instructing special education students. Based on the results of this study, it appears that the results work toward fulfilling the purpose of the study. The three important areas for instructing special education students were addressed by study participants. Participants recalled their experiences and factors that improved their confidence, which resulted in the themes that developed for this study and were detailed in Chapter 4. This promoted teacher confidence and advocacy for special education students. From feeling unprepared: “I do not feel that I was adequately prepared to serve students with disabilities,” the participants described developing a support system to help make up for their lack of special education knowledge: “I have a great support system through my team.” In like manner, general education teachers described being open to learning and gaining the knowledge they need through “on the job
training” and “trial and error.” This prompted participants to describe how their perceptions of special education students have changed: “They blew me out of the water, and now my expectations for them are--have changed dramatically.”

Each of the themes described in Chapter 4 related to influences that impacted the confidence of the general education teachers, and which appear to address the three important aspects of instructing special education students: differentiating and accommodating based on special education students’ needs, developing positive relations with stakeholders, and being open to adjusting one’s perceptions and expectations. Thus, recommendations will be presented that focus on addressing the needs of general education teachers to develop the confidence of general education teachers new to working with special education students. These recommendations are based on participants responses from this study.

**Recommendations for School Districts/School Administration/Teachers**

Recommendations for both new and veteran teachers beginning to work with special education students will be presented in this section. Based on the analysis of the participants’ responses in my study, the themes in Chapter 4 highlight what helped these general education teachers become more confident and comfortable working with special education students. These themes addressed the development of those important aspects. The themes also provide a guide to help to determine teacher needs, while also connecting with the existing literature discussed in chapter 2. Thus, these recommendations are designed to help general education teachers develop their special education knowledge/skills and improve their confidence in instructing special education students.

**Recommendation 1:** Professional development, while required for all teachers, is often subject-specific. Meghan stated, “I have not been to any specific special education PD, but I have
been to numerous reading/writing and math classes.” Numerous study participants revealed that they were interested in attending additional training for specific aspects of special education knowledge to better prepare themselves. DJ said, “Creating and different ways of modifying assessments are things I would like to learn more about.” Sporty suggested training to find “different types of instructional methods to help my special education students.” Betsy wanted “some other helpful strategies that have proven effective in helping these students.” Participant responses indicated that general education teachers want additional training that emphasizes special education instructional strategies or behavior management as opposed to only professional development for their grade level/subject content.

Thus, it is recommended that school administration and school districts provide general education teachers access to professional developments focused on special education training. It is recommended that school districts seek teacher feedback regarding more effective, practical, and relevant professional development activities. Similarly, school districts should develop cross subject trainings instead of focusing on subject-specific professional development (Honig & Rainey, 2015). School administration should collaborate with teachers to develop meaningful professional development that would meet teachers’ needs. Accordingly, school districts should design and implement professional development focused on specific skills desired by the general education teachers working with special education students. This could help general education teachers be better prepared when working with special education students.

**Recommendation 2:**

Collaboration, while reported being effective by the participants of this study, occurs infrequently (Rutherford, 2007). Participant responses indicated collaboration helps general education teachers develop their special education knowledge. Subsequently, teacher confidence
improves as a result of support. Accordingly, the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) devoted to collaboration is recommended. These PLCs should be dedicated to sharing information and knowledge, discussing past experiences with similar special education students, and allowing teachers to discuss problems and potential solutions.

There is a need for general education teachers to collaborate more frequently with teachers outside of their subject/grade. It can be argued that without support and collaboration, general education teachers may be unaware of the best ways to adjust their instruction to meet the needs of their students. Betsy said that she struggled until a co-worker showed her different strategies for working with special education students. Through collaboration, general education teachers report feeling more confident; this may be especially true for first-year teachers or veteran teachers who are struggling to adapt to instructing special education students.

The ideal development of such a PLC would include the current general education teachers working with special education students, the special education teachers in the school, and other general education teachers with experience in working with special education students. This PLC should meet regularly, be supported and encouraged by the administration, and have a set of shared goals that the group works to achieve (Strickland, 2009). These shared goals should focus on developing the knowledge of general education teachers and necessary areas of focus. An ideal overview of the group would involve the group working together as a whole, then working through recommendations in the typical co-teach inclusion classroom with the general education teacher and special education teacher. Additionally, the PLC should serve to promote increased communication between all staff involved in instructing special education students.
If the needs of collaboration and communication/support are not being met, then it can be assumed that teachers may not fully understand what they need to know to effectively instruct their special education students, may be unable to collaborate to better meet the needs of special education students, or may be unable to learn new skills to improve their own abilities. Riehl (2009) stipulated that administration can influence the attitude of the teachers in the school on a subject. Thus, increased emphasis on collaboration by the administration is likely to create a school climate that facilitates teacher communication with supervisors and other staff, a supportive environment that tolerates mistakes and works to eliminate teachers’ concerns regarding mistakes, and empowers teachers who are struggling in some areas.

**Ideas for Future Research**

The final theme of Chapter 4 detailed changing general education teacher perceptions/expectations of special education student abilities, leading a to transformative shift in becoming advocates for the success of their students. Thus, best methods for helping general education teachers become advocates for special education students should be further investigated. There is a meaningful difference between general education teachers having the knowledge to teach special education students in the classroom compared to general education teachers who have substantially changed their views on special education students and now work to help special education students achieve at high levels. As DJ said, “they blew me out of the water, and now my expectations for them are--have changed dramatically.” This change appears to develop as a culmination of various factors, such as development of teachers’ skills and providing these teachers with the support needs to develop those skills. Some general education teachers may be content to see their special education students demonstrate minimal achievement
and cause few problems in class. These teachers may be unwilling to challenge special education students to excel.

Minimal research is available regarding such a shift in the attitudes of general education teachers. Teacher bias was addressed, and teachers were prompted to take “an honest look at ourselves to see if we hold beliefs that potentially damage our ability to education and form relationships with our students” (Cooper, 2017). Teacher bias regarding special education students may prevent a shift in behavior that prohibits general education teachers from becoming advocates for special education students. However, my research did not indicate that bias was a prevailing factor among general education teachers regarding special education students, if bias is the determining factor in preventing the shift to advocate. Additional research into helping general education teachers better serve their special education students may offer insights that were not proposed as a part of this study.

Additionally, it would be interesting to apply this study to general education inclusion teachers at the high school level. High school teachers are more individualized from one another, even within the same grade. Therefore, high school general education teachers may have a different perspective regarding building confidence when working with special education students in the inclusive classrooms.

Self-Limitations

My study represents an outcome for general education teachers working with special education students in which these teachers have positive perceptions regarding special education students. However, this outcome may be dissimilar for other general education teachers. Each participant in my study completed all sources of data gathering – reflections, interviews, and observations. General education teachers developed their skills and knowledge to find ways to
better instruct special education students. However, the sample size of this study was limited to six participants. A larger sample size may have revealed a wider variety of thoughts and results may have varied. For instance, results from this study indicate that there are general education teachers who advocate for special education students and support their learning, there are likely some general education teachers working with special education students that do not become advocates for these students. Thus, these teachers may consider special education students especially difficult to teach. Thus, this study likely presents an ideal model and does not represent all general education teachers currently working with special education students. However, this study may help general education teachers develop the skills to better serve special education students, which should subsequently help these teachers improve their confidence.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examined how the results of my study related to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, which served as the theoretical framework of this study. Additionally, the connection between study results and the existing literature on building teacher confidence when working with special education students was scrutinized. Additionally, I sought to determine whether the results of this study fulfilled the study’s purpose. Based on the themes revealed from participants’ responses and the connections with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, this study does meet the purpose of finding ways to assist general education teachers in developing confidence when working with special education students. The four themes detailed in Chapter 4 address the primary needs of general education teachers: “I do not feel that I was adequately prepared to serve students with disabilities in college,” indicating a lack of preparation; developing a support system among their co-workers: “I have a great support system through my team;” gaining
confidence through experience and knowledge: “I have pretty much had on the job training” and through “trial and error;” and teacher confidence leading to a transformation of beliefs and assumptions: “They blew me out of the water, and now my expectations for them have changed dramatically.” These themes also address the stages of Maslow’s Hierarchy in that each need would provide another step in helping general education teachers become more confident and self-assured when instructing special education students.

The recommendations provided in this chapter focused on developing the needs of general education teachers that can realistically be met by either the school or the district so that general education teachers can subsequently meet the needs of special education students and develop confidence when working with these students. These recommendations are not guaranteed to improve the confidence of general education teachers. As suggested as a component of future research, teachers must begin to advocate for the higher learning of special education students. This change would demonstrate enhanced confidence from general education teachers regarding instructing special education students.

This study detailed a progression from general education teachers feel unprepared to instruction special education students to the development of a “support team.” This support team further helps to assist teachers in developing their knowledge/skills while “on the job” and via “trial and error.” The path ideally concludes with general education teachers experiencing a change in their perceptions/expectations of special education students and becoming advocates for their students’ learning, resulting in a level of self-efficacy in which general education teachers continuously improve their teaching abilities. This path helps general education teachers develop their skills in instructing special education students, which subsequently develops their confidence. It is my hope that this study will help fill in gaps that will ultimately
help improve general education teacher confidence in working with special education students, help general education teachers determine how to best fulfill their own knowledge/skill needs, and promote enhanced self-esteem among teachers through the development of their skills that would allow them to become more effective instructors of special education students.
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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Title of the Study: Confidence in General Education Teachers – Impact and Implications on Instruction of Special Education Students

Researcher: Stephen Davis

You are invited to participate in a study examining general education teacher confidence in instructing students with disabilities and how it impacts the instruction of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. This study is being conducted by Stephen Davis, and you may already be familiar with this teacher. This study is not being done in their role as a teacher for the school/county, but is being done solely for the researcher’s doctoral study.

Your informed consent is required for you to participate in this study. This letter will serve as your official notice of informed consent. This process will ensure that you are fully informed and can make an informed decision regarding your participation in the study. Before agreeing to participate please read this presented information carefully. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding about what influences and impacts a general teacher’s confidence in working with students with disabilities, what can be done to improve general education teachers’ confidence, and how it can improve the instruction of students with disabilities. The study is to be conducted by a local teacher/researcher in your school, currently attending Carson-Newman University, as part of the completion requirements for a doctorate of education degree.

Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no consequences for your decision of whether to participate or not. You may withdraw consent at anytime. Your withdrawal of consent will not harm your present or future relationship with the county.

Selection Criteria:

Participants who were chosen for this study are elementary teachers from grades 1-5 who instruct students with disabilities in the general education classrooms.

Procedures:
If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a reflection, participate in an interview, and be observed in the classroom. The reflection consists of 10 rating scale/open-ended questions, and the interview will last around 30-45 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The participant will receive an analysis of the interview to check for accuracy.

Risks:

Precautions have been taken to ensure that there are no foreseen risks to the participants.

Benefits:

Insights from the results of this study could provide a direction and guide for skill improvements of general teachers who struggle to instruct special education students. Results could lead to improvements in professional learning for general education teachers of students with disabilities. Additionally, it could provide a path to help teachers become more confident and comfortable when working with special education students. Thereby potentially improving the instruction of special education students.

Confidentiality:

The confidentiality of each participant will be maintained throughout the project. All identifying information will be removed from the final report. Pseudonyms will be used to replace the name of the county, schools, administrators, and participants. The final report will be reviewed for any information that might lead to the identity of the participant.

Field notes, interview transcriptions, and all other correspondence with participants will be stored on a password-protected external drive. All hard copies and recordings of data will be stored in a locked safe in the researcher's home office. All recording equipment and the computer to be used in data collections are personal items with access limited to only the researcher. Data will be destroyed after the required 5-year period.

Incentives:

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study.

Contacts:

Please feel free to ask any questions you might have at this point. If you have questions later you may contact the researcher, Stephen Davis at 423-443-6712, or ssdavis@cn.edu. You may also contact the committee chairperson, Dr. Brian Sohn, via email at bsohn@cn.edu.

Consent:
I hereby confirm that I am at least 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the statements included in this document. I am making an informed decision to participate in the study. I agree to participate in the study understanding that I may withdraw my consent at anytime. By replying to this email, I give my consent to participate in this study with the researcher. I understand the interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Signed: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

If you agree to participate, please copy and paste the above paragraph in an email reply. A signed hard copy will be obtained at a later time. It is recommended that you print or save this form for your records.
APPENDIX B

Participant Reflection

1. On a scale of 1 (Least confident) through 5 (Very confident)
Your level of confidence in instructing students with disabilities (SWD).

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. On a scale of 1 (Least confident) through 5 (Very confident)
Your confidence in managing behaviors of SWD in your classroom.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. On a scale of 1 (Little Preparation) through 5 (Very Prepared)
The level of preparation you have received for working with SWD.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. On a scale of 1 (Least confident) through 5 (Very confident)
How confident are you in differentiating instruction for the different needs of SWD?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. On a scale of 1 (Little Interaction) through 5 (One-on-One Instruction)
To what degree is your direct interaction with SWD in your classroom?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. Describe how confident you felt when first working with students with disabilities? What do you think influenced how confident you felt?

7. Please describe what you think might help you increase your confidence in instructing special education students. Why do you feel this might better help increase your confidence?

8. Please describe what preparation for SWD that you received in official teacher pre-service preparation courses in college. Do your feel your preparation programs prepared you to work with SWD? Why or why not?

9. Please describe how you have been prepared to work with special education students in any preparation/professional development done through your teaching position. How do you feel this level of preparation has influenced your confidence in working with SWD?

10. Are there areas in working with SWD (instructing, managing behaviors, assessing, etc.) that you feel the most and the least comfortable? Please describe the areas and why you feel that way.